



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

**A Case Study Exploring the Transition from Primary to
Post-Primary School from the Perspective of Parents and
the Implications for the Guidance Counselling Profession**

Rosemary Ahern

**Master of Arts in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan
Development**

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Perspective of Parents and the Implications for the Guidance Counselling Profession**

By

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the reward of Master of Arts in
Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development**

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Declaration

The author hereby declares that this thesis is entirely his/her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in University of Limerick, or in any other institution.

Signature: _____

Abstract

The main aim of this research is to conduct a case study exploring the transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of first year parents. The research also aims to establish what support guidance counsellors, teachers and parents provide to assist first years during this process. Additionally, the researcher will explore what strategies could be adopted to support future first year students from a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

From an international perspective, a vast amount of research exists regarding school transition and transitional support structures (Mackenzie et al., 2012; Rice et al., 2015; Riglin et al., 2013; Topping, 2011). The main body of research on school transition from an Irish perspective was conducted by Smyth et al., (2004).

This case study research provides an insight into the experiences of current first year students and explores what supports can be implemented for future students. This research study was centred on a case study design to examine the lived reality of first year students through the perspective of their parents. The data collection involved conducting six semi-structured interviews with the parents of first year students.

The main themes that emerged from the primary findings included the experiences of first year students who transitioned from primary to post-primary school, post-primary transitioning policy and practice, and finally a whole school approach to guidance counselling including a review of the role guidance counsellors, teachers and parents play in supporting incoming first year students.

The conclusions highlight that students experience some level of anxiety during the transition from primary to post-primary school. Parents are aware of the career and educational aspects of guidance counselling to 5th and 6th year students. Yet, the research revealed the need for clarification on the role guidance counsellors can play in supporting incoming first year students.

This research study emphasised the need to establish a formal transition programme to support first year students in the future. Finally, a number of recommendations were suggested to inform guidance counselling and education policy, practice and further research.

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List of Abbreviations

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DES	Department of Education
ERSI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NGF	National Guidance Forum
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development
PE	Physical Education
SEN	Special Educational Need
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SST	Student Support Team
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
TY	Transition Year
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This research study explores the transition from primary to post-primary school of first year students from the perspective of parents. The aim of this research study is to gain an understanding of the supports which can be implemented by post-primary schools to support the transition for young people and also the role a whole school approach to guidance counselling can provide during this stage. The subsequent sections discuss the context and explanation of the research, the researcher's position, the aims and objectives of the research, the methodology and the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Context and Justification for the Research Study

This research study examines the transition experiences from primary to post-primary school of first year students from the perspective of their parents. The research is situated in a post-primary school. From an Irish perspective, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) commissioned a large scale study in 2004. This study was conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI) and it suggested ways in which schools and teachers can support students as well as providing information for parents.

Firstly, in educational terms the NCCA (2005) have described transition as moving from one educational setting into another. Topping (2011) identified the transition to post-primary school as a change in location, curriculum, teacher and philosophy and suggested that feelings of anxiety prior to the transition can be improved through peer support. It has been identified that where post-primary schools implement an integration programme for first year pupils, these pupils tend to experience less difficulties in moving on from primary school (Smyth et al., 2004).

The DES (2012) highlighted post Budget 2012 a whole school approach to guidance counselling as the solution to delivering 'appropriate guidance' in post-primary schools. Budget 2016 and Budget 2017 have the reinstatement of two thirds of the original guidance provision being reallocated to post-primary schools (DES, 2017; TUI, 2015).

This research study aims to look at parents' perceptions on the role guidance counsellors and teachers play in providing guidance to first year students. While the transition of young people into post-primary school is a common area of research, the researcher wants to explore the experiences of current first year students and the role a whole school approach to guidance counselling can play in supporting students in the future. As The Teaching Council

(2012) outlines, the professional role of teachers is to respect the dignity of students and work collaboratively with students while also facilitating the ‘holistic development’ of students.

A recognised school shall use its available resources to ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.

(DES, 1998, p.13)

A whole school approach to guidance counselling in post-primary schools has been consistently promoted as a model of good practice (DES, 2012; DES, 2009; DES, 2005; DES, 1992; NCGE, 2004). To develop a whole school approach in establishing a guidance programme for all; parents, school staff and students need to be involved (DES, 2012; DES, 2009; DES, 2005; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; NCGE, 2004). The aim of the guidance counselling profession is to provide an all-inclusive approach to personal, educational, social and career guidance (DES, 2012; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; NCGE, 2004). The NCGE (2013) reported the pressure on guidance counsellors to deliver an integrated guidance programme to each year covering personal, educational, social and career guidance.

With social influences and developmental changes occurring during the transition to post-primary school, these can have an impact on a young person’s socio-emotional function and their behaviour. It was highlighted that support from parents, teachers and peers can help form their outcomes and experiences (Martinez et al., 2011).

As a first year post-primary school teacher, the researcher is interested in the experiences of current first year students who transitioned from primary to post-primary school. From an international perspective, various research studies have been conducted in relation to the insights into school transitions and transitional support structures (Mackenzie et al., 2012; Rice et al, 2015; Riglin et al., 2013; Topping, 2011). From an Irish perspective, the experiences of first year students and social relationships have been researched in post-primary educational settings (Smyth, 2016a; Smyth et al., 2004).

The justification for this research study, in the opinion of the researcher, is to explore post-primary education policy and practice and research from an Irish and international context relating to the transition of young people from primary to post-primary school. Additionally, the researcher would like to explore the attitudes of parents towards a whole school approach to guidance counselling including a review of the role a guidance counsellor, teachers and parents play can play in supporting incoming first year students.

1.2 Positionality of Researcher

An interpretivist research study requires the researcher to state their positionality (Thomas, 2009). Hence, the researcher has worked as a teacher for the past ten years in the chosen case

study post-primary school. Firstly, the researcher's personal interest in this topic is to become aware of the experiences first year students have when transitioning to post-primary school and secondly, to identify supports and strategies which can be implemented as a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

The researcher is currently a teacher in the case study school and therefore decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with the parents of first year students to address bias. Robson (2007) indicated that this was 'insider' research as the researcher played a role in the research location. The researcher is familiar with the research setting and parents were willing to partake in the research. Throughout this research study, reflexivity has assisted the researcher to critically reflect on their position and to ensure the validity of the research remained intact (Thomas, 2009).

1.3 Research Methodology

The researcher was predominantly interested in understanding the transition experiences of first year students. A single case study approach was adopted where semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents of first year students (Thomas, 2009). Semi-structured interviews provide a list of topics to be discussed with the freedom to explore necessary opinions further (Thomas, 2009).

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The primary aim in conducting this research study is to explore the transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of parents of first year students.

The specific objectives were:

1. To examine relevant literature in relation to the transition of young people from primary to post-primary school.
2. To illuminate first year students' experiences of transition through the use of semi-structured interviews with their parents.
3. To explore what supports parents seek when dealing with issues in relation to their son or daughter.
4. To investigate parents understanding of the guidance service in post-primary school including the role of guidance counsellors and teachers in supporting first year students through a whole school approach.
5. To investigate the role of parents in preparing their son/daughter for the transition to post-primary school.

6. To explore what supports and strategies could be implemented to improve the transition experience for future first year students.
7. To consider strategies pertinent to the transition of young people to post-primary with a view to informing guidance counselling and education policy, research and practice.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

The following is the structure of this thesis:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter sets out the context of the study by looking at the transition of young people from primary to post-primary school, examining the aims and objectives of this research study, the researcher's position in the study and the methodology adopted.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In chapter two, the researcher reviews the wide-ranging, relevant literature and policies. The researcher offers a critical appraisal of post-primary education policy and practice along with research from an Irish and international context relating to the transition of young people from primary to post-primary school. Chapter two will also examine a whole school approach to guidance counselling including a review of the role that guidance counsellors, teachers and parents play in support incoming first year students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter defines the theoretical and practical approach used in this research study. The research questions are outlined together with a justification for the chosen research model. The method of data collection and analysis are discussed. The issues of reliability, validity, reflexivity and ethical research practice are defined.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter provides a discussion of the predominant themes and sub-themes which emerged from the primary findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, an analysis of the findings is presented and supported from the relevant literature.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter six provides a conclusion to the research study by summarising the key findings which emerged. This chapter also includes recommendations which could be explored by educational providers to improve the guidance counselling provision in post-primary schools in terms of policy, practice and future research.

1.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview and justification for this research study and to outline the researcher's position. It outlined the main topic within a theoretical context in relation to theory, policy and practice. It presented the positionality of the researcher and outlined the methodology. This introductory chapter stated the aims and objectives underpinning this study. Finally, it outlined the structural framework of the thesis. Chapter two will now provide an in-depth examination of the wide-ranging literature relevant to the theoretical and practical context.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to establish the theoretical background in this exploratory case study research (Yin, 2014; Yin, 2009). The transition from primary to post-primary school can lead to some level of anxiety for most young people (Rice et al., 2015). From an international perspective, the literature available on the transition from primary to post-primary school is vast. The challenge is to focus on the concerns that are associated with the transition from primary to post-primary school and the strategies which post-primary schools can implement to support young people during this process.

The literature review includes Irish and international policy documents, research reports and journals and reports from education and guidance counselling representative organisations. It also contains literature discussing concepts and theories including relevant web based articles and conference papers.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents Post-Primary Education Policy and Practice introduced by the Irish Government from 1924-2017. The second section examines literature in relation to the transition of young people from primary to post-primary school from an Irish and international perspective. The final section discusses a whole school approach to guidance counselling. Furthermore, it includes an exploration of the role guidance counsellors and relevant stakeholders play in supporting incoming first year students.

2.1 Post-Primary Education Policy and Practice

This section focuses on Irish post-primary policy and practice. The first section examines key developments relating to a co-educational community college from 1924 to 1960 and the second section covers the years 1961 to 2017.

2.1.1 Irish Post-Primary Policy and Practice 1924-1960

Irish post-primary education policy and practice stems from the Intermediate Education (Amendment) Act 1924. Hyland and Milne (1992) highlighted that this Act delivered a new programme for post-primary schools which placed an emphasis on grants and academic achievement but argued that it placed less importance on the social issue of student retention. The Vocational Education Committees (VEC's) were established under the Vocational Education Act (1930) for the purpose of improving student retention with the introduction of

‘technical education’. The aim of the VEC’s was to provide a system of education with an emphasis on technical and vocational skills, though the Irish social outlook at this time tended to place a higher status on academic centred secondary schools (Elsner et al., 2008). This continued until the ‘Whitaker Report’ was published in 1958 which highlighted the influence that economic policy has on education discourse (Adshead, 2008) with the OECD (2011) highlighting that education policies are developed and implemented both nationally and internationally by governments to help with economic recovery.

2.1.2 Post-Primary Policy and Practice 1960-2017

In 1966, Ireland saw the introduction of free secondary education and in 1967 the Primary Certificate was abolished which saw a massive increase in the numbers of young people attending secondary school (INTO, 2008). In 1970, a document called ‘Community School’ was unveiled to help reduce the varying differences between secondary and vocational schools (Hyland and Milne, 1992). Ireland’s entry to the European Economic Community in 1973 saw the first Community College open under the patronage of the VEC (Hyland and Milne, 1992). The aim of establishing both Community and Comprehensive schools was to ensure all students had access to post-primary education (DES, 2011). In 1981, the Department of Education published the ‘Report of the Pupil-Transfer Committee’ highlighting recommendations which could be implemented to solve the issues of transition (INTO, 2008). In the report, key areas such as loneliness and bullying were identified, where nearly 20% of pupils experienced social, emotional, intellectual, physical or other problems as obstacles in achieving a successful transfer. Poor communication between pupils, parents, teachers and the school authorities in primary and secondary schools was identified. The report highlighted the poor results achieved in the Intermediate Certificate by students in Geography, Irish and Mathematics. It also recommended that important measures be introduced to align the teaching methodologies in the primary and post-primary curriculum, thus facilitating smoother transition process. This was addressed through teacher in-service (INTO, 2008). In 1999, the Primary School Curriculum made reference to the consistency of teaching approaches in primary and Junior Certificate curricula and proposed enhanced communication between both through the provision of assessment measures with regard to the transition from primary to post-primary school (INTO, 2008). A report on first year students conducted by Smyth et al. (2004) also highlighted that a large number of students experienced a disjoint in the learning practices and teaching methodologies between primary and post-primary school.

The Education Act, 1998 made it statutory for all persons involved in the education of a child to collaborate in the best interests of all children (DES, 1998). The Education Welfare Act (2000) raised the school leaving age to sixteen but also highlighted school attendance and the educationally disadvantaged. In 2001 the introduction of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act saw VEC's gaining more autonomy over their management structure, expenditure and governance (DES, 2001). In 2013 the VEC system was restructured to become the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) (DES, 2013a).

The reformed Junior Certificate course is currently being introduced in post-primary schools on a phased basis (DES, 2014a). As part of this reformation, first year students starting in September 2017 will start a new Wellbeing Programme. Wellbeing will include physical education (PE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and guidance counselling (DES, 2013b).

In the Irish education structure, young people usually move from a small primary school to a larger secondary school (Smyth, 2016a). In 2014, the DES announced that all primary students would have an "education passport" sent on to their accepted post-primary school (DES, 2014b). The NCCA have developed a template to ensure that information in relation to a student's literacy and numeracy levels are communicated to the post-primary school.

2.2 Irish and International Transition Policy from Primary to Post-Primary

The transition from primary to post-primary school has been defined as follows:

Transition from primary to secondary school is seen as an important crossroad as young people move from a small, self-contained classroom to a large, more heterogeneous school with increased expectation of independent academic performance and less teachers' scaffolding.

(Hanewald, 2013, p.64)

Research suggests that young people in Ireland and abroad share many of the same anxieties and concerns when making the transition to secondary school (Mellor and Delamont, 2011). Nonetheless, young people have indicated that they have outgrown their primary school and feel ready for the challenge of secondary school when the time comes (Mellor and Delamont, 2011). Benner (2011) indicated that research on the transition to secondary school has been focused on distinct areas of pupil adaptation and academic achievement while lacking a consensus on the definition of transition success. Educationalists have been interested in the effect transition to secondary school has on young people. Galton et al. (2000) indicated that during the first few months in secondary school, up to 40% of pupils experienced a regression in their academic progress. A number of reasons have been identified such as the adjustment to more than one teacher with various teaching styles during the school day and the effect of

intimidation by older students. It also emphasised being separated from their friends, the beginning of puberty, a longer commute time to secondary school, the movement to and from different classrooms and a lack of curricular connection from primary to secondary school (Galton et al., 2000). Further evidence points towards girls expressing more apprehension than boys about moving to secondary school (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; O'Brien, 2001).

2.2.1 Irish Perspective

In 2016, more than 57,657 young people made the transition from primary to post-primary school in Ireland (CSO, 2016). Research suggests that approximately 14% of students take more than one month to settle in to post-primary school, which equates to around 8,070 students per year nationally (Smyth et al., 2004). O'Brien (2004) highlighted that schools were beginning to view the transfer in to secondary education as a period of special importance in the lives of students.

From an Irish context, research has been limited on the transition from primary to post-primary school. The NCCA research conducted by the ERSI involved 900 students over three years. This study indicated that about one in ten students, but especially those with low levels of self-confidence, experienced transition issues such as adjusting to a bigger school and adapting to new friends and teachers (Smyth et al., 2004). Furthermore, it highlighted that transition issues can lead to subsequent academic failure (Smyth et al., 2004). However, the study also revealed that student contact with the post-primary school prior to entry by attending the open day/evening, receiving an information booklet and visits by the secondary school principal to the feeder primary schools, all help to support the transition process for new first year students (Smyth et al., 2004). Additionally, it indicated that principals rated the class tutor and yearhead system as being the main sources of information in supporting first year students to integrate into post-primary school (Smyth et al., 2004). The integration of students from various primary schools can be hard to manage unless it is given thought and strategies are put in place (Smyth et al., 2004). Difficulties can arise for students who are concerned with time pressures to complete their homework, bullying from older students, relationships with their teachers, not having many of their primary school friends in their class or adjusting to the length of the school day (Smyth et al., 2004). Similarly, Darmody (2008) found the increase in the number of subjects for first year students hindered their settling into post-primary school.

2.2.2 International Perspective

Internationally there has been a vast amount of research conducted on the transition from primary to post-primary school. Various studies indicate that a minority of pupils experience a variety of difficulties when adjusting to secondary school which is revealed by poor attendance, disruptive behaviour, lower grades in assessments and increased anxiety (Anderson et al., 2000; Galton et al., 2000). Research conducted in the UK suggested a partnership approach between parents, schools and young people should be established to confront transition issues such as curriculum continuity and institute and social adjustment (Evangelou et al., 2008). Additionally, the study implied that where close association and organisation between the primary and secondary school exists, these were categorised as the most effective schools in terms of providing a successful transition (Evangelou et al., 2008).

It was indicated that students who have previously experienced stressful life events are more likely to experience stress on the transfer from primary to post-primary school (Karagiannopolou, 1999). However, with the various views on the transition experiences of students, Hargreaves and Galton (2002) suggested that at best, students suffer from minor anxiety, while on the other hand, the transition to post-primary school can lead to profound anxiety for other students. In addition, an unsuccessful transition has been identified as leading to disengagement from school on the part of young people (Anderson et al., 2000).

Nevertheless, Rice (2001) found that situational variables such as having an older sibling in post-primary school, a strong peer network and a supportive home environment all help to facilitate a successful transition for students. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2000) identified that having a positive rapport with an older sibling can support a successful transition due to the information and knowledge being provided to the younger sibling.

2.2.3 Transition Programme

Where links are established between the primary and secondary school, this indicates a lower level of school anxiety for pupils (Rice et al., 2015). Moreover, where post-primary schools have an integration programme in place, pupils tend to experience fewer difficulties moving on from primary school (Smyth et al., 2004). Furthermore, there are long term positive effects for pupils in delivering effective interventions to support the transition process (Gottfredson and Hussong, 2011). Although many primary and secondary schools offer programs to support pupils, the content and focus can vary significantly (Evangelou et al., 2008). Smyth et al. (2004) suggest that where secondary schools create an informal structure to care for young people making the transition, this can have a better impact than providing

formal supports such as peer mentoring and integration programmes. Transfer programmes focusing on common concerns have been implemented in schools mainly classed as disadvantaged but have failed to support the needs of young people on an continuing social and academic basis (INTO, 2008). Evidence from Rice et al. (2015) implies that schools should deliver strategies which support pupils transitioning through a whole school approach and to provide further strategies to vulnerable pupils.

Research findings have found that there is a gap in the amount of information being transferred from primary to post-primary schools (NCCA, 2004). The information received is typically verbal communication giving details about a student's behaviour and academic performance (NCCA, 2004). One of the recommendations to come from the study by Smyth et al. (2004) was for the Department of Education and Skills and the NCCA to develop and implement a module for all 6th class students in primary schools in Ireland.

The DES (2009) identified that 48% of students surveyed at Junior Cycle chose their subject options before starting post-primary school, while 60% of students did not get an opportunity to try the subject options before choosing which ones they would study for their Junior Certificate.

Research has highlighted that students who transition from primary to post-primary school are usually concerned about getting lost in the new school environment, finding the academic work harder and therefore achieving lower academic results as well as the worry of being bullied by older students (Qualter et al., 2007; Rice et al., 2011). Consequently, two international research studies highlighted that transition programmes have been effective in reducing students' fears about the transition to post-primary school (Bloyce and Frederickson, 2012; Carmen et al., 2011).

Similarly, Graham and Hill (2003) highlighted that induction days have been helpful in supporting students as they transition from primary to post-primary school. West et al. (2008) found that the transition to secondary school can be difficult for some pupils and this had led to an adverse effect on pupil's self-esteem and academic achievement at age 18. This indicates the need for strategies to help with the transition process so that pupils' wellbeing and achievement is not affected in the long term (Rice et al., 2015).

2.2.4 Supporting students with Special Educational Needs

The introduction of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) stated that students with SEN have the right to be educated in an inclusive environment, treated with equity and supported throughout their schooling. It has been suggested that most

students take a couple of weeks to adapt to the new school environment, but it has also been indicated that students with a special educational need may require additional support and a number of school terms to successfully participate with new course material. The NCSE (2013) research on the transition for SEN students indicated that coordination across schools is required to ensure support is available to meet individual student needs. The DES (2005) indicated that secondary schools and feeder primary schools should have communication established between the primary and post-primary school to support SEN students.

2.2.5 Student's Developmental Stages during Transition

In referring to Erikson's Psychoanalytic Theory, adolescents go through the fifth developmental stage recognised as 'Identity versus Identity Confusion' at a time when they are facing puberty and the transition to post-primary school (Steinberg, 1999). Reid and Westergaard (2011, p.7), indicated that adolescence can be seen as "the most turbulent, unsettling, yet exciting that we experience in our lives". Erikson (1995) indicated that adolescents experience identity and role confusion. Therefore, identity and role confusion can arise from the transition from 6th class (eldest students) to first year (youngest group). This social repositioning from being the eldest in primary school to becoming the youngest in post-primary school can cause feelings of being lost in finding their way from a social and spatial point of view (Smyth, 2016b). Adolescence brings about an exploration of self-definition and beliefs which can often lead to a period of rebellion (Hamman and Hendricks, 2005).

The transition to secondary school can often bring about changed friendship formations (Weller, 2007). A major concern for pupils is the formation of new friendships and losing old friendships when transitioning to secondary school (Pratt and George, 2005; Rice et al., 2011; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Despite the disruption which can often occur to friendships, research indicates that after the transition to secondary school, young people felt less social seclusion (Gillison et al., 2008; Smyth, 2016a). Furthermore, Topping (2011) highlights that feelings of anxiety about the transition can be improved through peer support. Rice et al. (2015) indicates that pupils who remained friends with their 'best friend' were found to be less disruptive and tended to perform better academically.

Evidence also suggested that pupils who had a large group of friends experienced fewer worries about secondary school and pupils who formed part of a disruptive peer group were less likely to perform well academically (Rice et al., 2015). Poulin and Chan (2010) suggest that the quality and characteristics of peer friendships affects a child's psychosocial and

academic progress, though little research has been done on the impact of friendship stability. It is indicated that where adolescents hold a high level of emotional intelligence, this contributes to an easier academic and social transition (Adeyemo, 2005). Conversely, Gerner and Wilson (2005) highlighted that adolescence is a time where students usually place excessive status on being socially accepted. However, Smith (2006) implies that the quality of peer relationships can be one of the strongest signs of both current and future mental health in students. Yet evidence indicated “there was no single group of children who were especially vulnerable to a poor transition” (Rice et al., 2015, p.6).

2.3 Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

In 1966, guidance counselling was introduced into Irish post-primary education due to lower emigration rates and a fast growing industrialised sector (Andrews, 2011). The promotion of an integrated guidance counselling programme for the past four decades as a whole school approach has been recognised as a model of good practice through various policy reforms and this is reflected in the *Green Paper on Education* (DES, 2012; DES, 2009; DES, 2005; DES, 1992; NCGE, 2004). For a whole school approach to be delivered, it is essential that planning is conducted to identify, prioritise and respond to the needs of students and to identify the roles and responsibilities of staff and management in providing ‘appropriate guidance’ (ACCS et al., 2012).

The OECD (2004) indicated that funding from government for career guidance affects the nature and quality of provision. Furthermore, internationally it has been indicated that career guidance is favoured over the counselling dimension of guidance counselling (Council of the European Union, 2008; ELGPN, 2014). However, the guidance counselling profession in Ireland aims to provide young people with a whole school approach to guidance counselling which is an all-inclusive and collaborative approach to personal, social, educational and career counselling (DES, 2012; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; IGC, 2008; NCGE, 2004). Through this approach, parents, students and school staff are involved in preparing and establishing a guidance programme for all (DES, 2012; DES, 2009; DES, 2005; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; NCGE, 2004). Nonetheless, there is a lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of secondary schools in adopting a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne et al., 2016a; Hearne and Galvin, 2014). Similarly, it has been indicated that in Ireland, the delivery of guidance counselling as a WSA has been implemented because it follows the previous curricular structure (Moynihan et al., 2015).

It was proposed that secondary schools would have more autonomy on how best to prioritise the resources accessible to them to meet the constitutional responsibilities to guidance provision arising from the Education Act (1998) (DES, 2012). Research conducted by various stakeholders has shown a substantial reduction in the amount of time allocated for one-to-one guidance counselling and this has revealed an inequality where senior level students take precedence over junior level students (Hearne et al., 2016a; IGC, 2016; IGC, 2014; IGC, 2013; Leahy et al., 2017; NCGE, 2013;). As a result ETB community colleges and schools have lost 27% of their guidance hours from 2011/12 to 2015/16 (IGC, 2016). The ASTI (2013) identified 78% of schools altered their guidance counselling provision, with reductions in one-to-one counselling reported in 70% of schools. Similarly, the TUI (2014) identified 93% of schools had reductions in individual and group guidance provision. Despite research demonstrating the pivotal role guidance counsellors play in supporting students through Junior Cycle and shaping their future outcomes (Smyth and Calvert, 2011), students in Junior Cycle remain for the most part marginalised (Hearne et al., 2016a; IGC, 2013). There seems to be a greater emphasis being placed on guidance counselling to Transition, 5th and 6th Year students to prepare them for working life or further education (DES, 2009; McCoy et al., 2014; McCoy et al., 2006).

The benefits of engaging young people in educational and career guidance in their early school years can have a positive impact on their achievement, retention, career decision-making and life transitions (Barnes et al., 2011; Dietrich and Salmela-Aro, 2013; Pullen et al., 2013). It is essential as graduates are finding it challenging to secure employment which has often resulted in underemployment, initial employment mismatches and the achievement of social equity and justice (DES, 2005; Koen et al., 2012; McCarthy, 2012; OECD, 2004).

2.3.1 Role of Guidance Counsellor

Guidance in schools can be defined as:

A range of learning experiences provided in developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance.

(DES, 2005, p.4)

Geary and Liston (2009) stressed that a guidance counsellor's role includes planning and organisation, support, counselling, assessment, classroom guidance activities, workshop learning, information provision, referrals and professional development.

In supporting incoming first year students, the DES (2005) outlined that a guidance counsellor can implement supports and strategies such as open days, induction days, provide an information booklet to parents and students, share information between feeder primary schools and the post-primary school, as well as providing one-to-one counselling. Furthermore, by co-operating with relevant staff, a guidance plan can be implemented for students and parents where information can be disseminated about the choice of Junior Cycle programmes available, appropriate levels of study and the subject choices for students. The implications of these may affect the type of work or study students wish to pursue in the future (DES, 2005).

Additionally, guidance counsellors can offer solutions to students dealing with psychological problems which could affect their studies and they can assist students by getting them to appreciate those around them to help create a harmonious environment (Kidd, 2006).

Nonetheless, Bimrose (2006) advocates the importance of communicating the professional identity of guidance counsellors. It was recognised that schools varied greatly in the nature of the guidance counsellor's role (McCoy et al., 2006). Furthermore, due to the lack of clarity on the role of guidance counsellors, it has been identified that inconsistencies may have arisen in guidance programme content and provision as a result (McCoy et al., 2006).

With the reduction in the number of guidance counsellors available to support second level students and nine schools reporting to having no qualified guidance counsellor employed, this has had a major effect on the wellbeing of children and an increase in those presenting with distress (IGC, 2016). Consequently, 300 guidance counselling posts will be restored in post-primary schools by September 2017 (DES, 2017).

2.3.2 Role of Teachers

Not alone can peer friendships enter a state of unrest but there is considerable change in the nature of teacher relationships across the transition (McLaughlin and Clarke, 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Next to guidance counsellors, teachers are the next most important influence in facilitating a successful transition programme in secondary school (Morgan and Hertzog, 2001).

In research conducted by Lam and Hui (2010), evidence suggests that teachers described their role as coaches, guides, caregivers, friends and role models. In working with students in twelve secondary schools in Hong Kong, they considered the involvement of teachers within a whole school approach to guidance counselling. The evidence implies that school management should encourage teachers to participate in collaborating, communicating and

sharing guidance aims as they form the largest collection of professionals who relate with pupils on a regular basis (Lam and Hui, 2010).

However, regular teachers hold different beliefs, such as the involvement in the emotional and social development of students being outside their remit (Hornby and Atkinson, 2003). Moreover, they reported that their responsibility lies in teaching their academic subject (Lohrmann et al., 2008). Furthermore, some teachers imply that guidance and counselling is an area of expertise (Finney, 2006).

Research has identified that teachers play an important role in providing educational guidance to students in relation to subject choice and career options (Hearne et al., 2016b). However, some teachers recognised their role as providing academic subject related guidance while other teachers were providing personal and social guidance through their involvement as yearheads. Others reported as having no role in the delivery of guidance (Hearne et al., 2016b).

In delivering a WSA to guidance counselling, research suggests that students have a positive experience when an affirmative student-teacher relationship exists (Lam and Hui, 2010; NEWB, 2008). Furthermore, research has highlighted that the quality of teacher-student relationships can effect students' commitment to school work, their academic success, their level of discipline issues and also their socio-emotional wellbeing (Smyth, 2015). Then again, due to the increase in both student and teacher numbers, it has been suggested that students find it more difficult to form a secure attachment with a teacher (Jindal-Snape and Foggie, 2008).

Finally, teachers can be promoted to yearhead, otherwise known as assistant principal duties. The role of a yearhead is to work with management, school staff, colleagues, parents and outside agencies in implementing a whole school policy to guidance and student wellbeing (JMB, 2014).

2.3.3 Role of Parents

In 1937, the Irish Government acknowledged in Article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland that parents are the primary teachers of their children (Government of Ireland, 1937).

School is regarded as an extension of the home and an active partnership between parents and teachers make this a reality, especially in the eyes of the young child, who is the central figure.

(DES, 2006, p.1)

Parents were recognised as having a fundamental role in the development of the school guidance plan (DES, 2005). Evidence suggests that young people are at a disadvantage if

their parents are unfamiliar with the school system, culture and the specific and practical facts of secondary level education (Bourdieu, 1986).

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found a strong link exists between parental support and student adjustment levels. One of the characteristic changes in an adolescent's social behaviour is the movement towards independence from their parents which in turn increases their reliance on friends (Collins and Laursen, 2004, as cited in Bokhorst et al., 2010).

During the transition to secondary school, developmental changes and social influences occur, which have an impact on a young person's behaviour and socio-emotional function. This highlights the need for support from teachers, parents and peers to help shape their outcomes and experiences (Martinez et al., 2011). Rice et al. (2015) found that pupils settled in less well academically to secondary school where their parents experienced high levels of apprehension about the transition. Where parents showed warmth when listening to their children's concerns, this had a strong effect on helping to expand their self-control. Self-control in children is an essential element in helping a child to bond with peers and achieve academic performance during the transition to secondary school (Rice et al., 2015).

Smyth's (2016a) evidence indicates that parents play a vital role in helping to support their children in adjusting to their secondary school. Rice et al. (2015) proposes that parents can support their children by checking their homework diary, encouraging them to start their homework early and by clarifying that the young person understands what is being asked of them. Smyth (2016a) implies that parents play a much less essential role in helping young people with their homework. It suggests that where a child received no help from parents with their homework in primary school, they perceived themselves to have a better academic self-image when they were aged 13, thus concluding that parental involvement with homework is an indication of a child experiencing academic difficulty as opposed to the parental investment of resources. Rice et al. (2015) highlighted that parents tend to be concerned with friendships and homework in relation to their son or daughter transitioning to secondary school.

2.4 Conclusion

It is evident from the literature review that the transition from primary to post-primary school is a complex one with various challenges for young people. The aim of this research was to explore the challenges facing young people and to investigate the support which they require in making a smoother transition to post-primary school.

The review included an exploration of Irish post-primary education policy and practice introduced from 1924 to 2017. Additionally, it examined literature from an Irish and international perspective on the transition of young people from primary to post-primary school. Finally, a whole school approach to guidance counselling was examined to review the role of guidance counsellors, teachers and parents in supporting young people as they make the transition into post-primary school. Chapter three presents the methodology and qualitative method adopted to address this issue.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the primary and secondary research questions that underpin this study. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the methodology outlining its strengths and limitations. This chapter will also explore the research case study design, data collection, access to participants, validity, reliability and ethical issues.

3.1 Identification of Research Questions

Research is undertaken for various reasons which include an investigation, evaluation or to progress practice (Thomas, 2009). Research is not about proving something but it is about searching for a factual answer to a real question (Thomas, 2009). “A piece of research is built around a question, it is not built around a method” (Thomas, 2011, p.43). In qualitative research, the creation of research questions is closely linked to related literature (Bryman, 2012). The crucial points when posing research questions are what does the researcher want to find out and why is it essential to identify an answer to make a change to the world around us (Bryman, 2012). However, it is imperative to remember that both the personal values and experience of the researcher can impact the research topic, questions and methods employed in the research study (Bryman, 2012). Though, Bryman (2007) posits the formulation of research questions can be a challenging process, Merriam (2001) emphasises that it is critical before choosing an appropriate methodology.

3.1.1 Primary Research Question

The primary research question of this case study is ‘to explore the transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of first year parents and its implications for the guidance counselling profession’. Smyth et al. (2004) states that about one in ten students, particularly those with low levels of self-confidence; experience transition issues such as adjusting to a larger school and adapting to new teachers and friends. Additionally, it indicated that transition issues can lead to subsequent academic failure (Smyth et al., 2004). Furthermore, research suggests that an unsuccessful transition can lead to possible disengagement from school (Anderson et al., 2000).

3.1.2 Secondary Research Questions

The secondary questions from the study are as follows:

1. What has the transition experience been for students transitioning from primary to post-primary?
2. Consider Irish and international literature and policies pertaining to the transition of first year students.
3. Explore the supports available to students transitioning to post-primary school.
4. What are parent's understanding of the career guidance service role in post-primary school?
5. What role teachers play in implementing a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school?
6. What role parents have in preparing students for post-primary school?

3.2 Methodology and Methods

Research has highlighted how the majority of guidance counselling studies are still undertaken using the quantitative paradigm (Sampson et al., 2014; Whiston et al., 2013). Though quantitative research methods are more dominant, qualitative research methods have gained attention in recent decades (Sted et al. 2012).

The researcher identified a qualitative research method as the most appropriate to help answer the primary and secondary research questions. According to Bryman (2012) qualitative research is influenced by interpretivism and subsequently allows researchers to observe events through the eyes of the individuals they are studying.

A qualitative approach would allow the parents the freedom to speak about their son's/daughter's experience in moving to secondary school rather than putting words in their mouth to suit the researcher.

3.3 Selection of Appropriate Research Paradigm

3.3.1 Definition of Research Paradigm

The two distinct paradigms are 'positivist' and 'interpretive' (Thomas, 2013). The positivist paradigm can be described as "observable, controllable and measurable" (Basit, 2010, p.14). In social research, the positivist approach has been the leading paradigm for decades in gaining knowledge through scientific experiments and methods (Thomas, 2013). However in recent times, the positivist approach has been questioned in relation to its inadequacy in clarifying how people live and interpret the world (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013).

As Thomas (2013) identified, the specific approach chosen is more significant than the actual approach itself.

3.3.2 Qualitative (interpretivist) Research

Qualitative research is used to comprehend people's perceptions of the world (Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Qualitative research, otherwise known as interpretivist research, emphasises the exploration of in-depth quality data as opposed to quantifying it (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research has the capacity to deliver complex textual accounts of how participants experience a given research issue and it can capture meanings and insights which quantitative methods frequently cannot (Bryman, 2012).

3.3.3 The Strengths of Qualitative Research

According to Bryman (2012) there are a number of particular strengths in using qualitative research methods when studying educational research topics. Firstly, the researcher gets an opportunity to immerse themselves in the position or culture where the participants are speaking from to gain a more accurate interpretation of the lived world which cannot be experienced through the use of statistical and numerical analysis (Bryman, 2012). The researcher gets the opportunity to interact with the participants on their own terms and through the use of their own language. It also gives the researcher primary data which describes existing phenomena and current happenings in relation to the research topic (Bryman, 2012). Most importantly qualitative research has the capacity to produce outcomes which can be supportive in forging new ways of understanding as qualitative research can be flexible in the way data is collected and also through the interpretation and analysis process (Bryman, 2012).

3.3.4 The Limitations of Qualitative Research

Research suggests that using qualitative research can raise some concerns in relation to its lack of formal processes, it can be too subjective and it can have a higher risk of research bias (Bryman, 2012).

Another limitation is the sample size. I had initially set out to hold interviews with at least eight participants. The sample is small but provided a comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon of transition experiences in the post-primary school being researched.

3.4 Research Design Frame: Case Study

A case study design gives the researcher the opportunity to look more deeply and from a variety of angles. As a result “a more rounded, richer, more balanced picture of our subject is developed, we get a three-dimensional view” (Thomas, 2011, p.4). This research topic is centred on the real-life transition of young people from primary to post-primary school with a view to exploring this from the perspective of parents.

3.4.1 Definition of a Case Study

In education and guidance counselling research, case studies are used for various reasons (Cohen et al., 2011; McLeod, 2010; Yin, 2014; Yin, 2009) and because they can provide opportunities to explore complex issues to inform policy and practice (McLeod, 2010). The strength of the case study research method is its usefulness in unravelling the complexity of one defined entity (Stake, 2009).

However, it is suggested that case study research is time consuming and requires the negotiation and validation of participants (Yin, 2014). Similarly, certain weaknesses of case study research have been identified in relation to validity and reliability (Cohen et al., 2011; Yin, 2014; Yin, 2009).

3.5 Data Collection

The purpose of this section is to outline the method of data collection selected for this research topic. The researcher selected qualitative research and conducted semi-structured interviews. The timeline of data collection is shown in Figure 3.1.

24/11/16 Received permission from the Gate Keeper	13/12/16 Attended the Parent’s Council meeting	21/12/16 Conducted Pilot Interview	17/01/17 to 01/02/17 Individual Interviews with parents	01/03/17 to 08/03/17 Member Checking (Interviewees view transcripts)
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Figure 3.1 Timeline of Data Collection

The method of data collection chosen was semi-structured interviews with parents/guardians. The advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews is the fact that an interviewer can “follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do” (Bell, 2010, p.161). The interviewer can listen to the participants’ tone of voice, possible hesitation in their answers and observe their body

language and facial expressions (Bell, 2010). The researcher found the data collection process insightful.

3.5.1 Access

The researcher accessed participants through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling occurs when the researcher selects participants and a site to study “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p.156).

One post-primary school was chosen as the case study site. The gate keeper was the school principal. Once full ethical approval was received on the 17th of November, 2016, a Subject Information Sheet was sent to the Principal with a Consent Form to the gate keeper. Once permission was granted the researcher accessed the Chairperson of the Parents Council and subsequently the parents/guardians of first year students on the 24th of November, 2016. The Principal Subject Information Sheet set out the purpose and structure of the research. The purpose of subject information sheets are to highlight the rationale behind the research study (Bryman, 2012).

The researcher then sent a Subject Information Sheet with their contact details to the Chairperson of the Parents Council on the 28th of November, 2016. The Chairperson emailed the researcher on the 6th of December 2016 to inform them that the next Parents Council meeting was taking place on the 13th of December, 2016. At the Parents Council meeting, the researcher distributed a Parent/Guardian Subject Information Sheet, a Parent/Guardian Consent Form and a stamped addressed envelope to all first-year parents present at the meeting. The researcher received permission from the delegates of the Parents Council to send a Parent Information Sheet and Parent/Guardian Consent Form to all parents of first year students.

Six participants volunteered for this research study. The dates and times of the interviews were negotiated with the six participants. Each participant was contacted the day before their interview to confirm their attendance. All six participants who volunteered were female varying in age from 40 to 52 years of age. Two of the participants were first time parents of first year students.

3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

In qualitative research three types of interviews exist; structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Thomas, 2013). Structured interviews can be conducted consistently as the

interviewer asks the same questions. However, the limitation of structured interviews is the rigidity in not allowing the interviewer to follow up on a comment the participant said (Thomas, 2013). Unstructured interviews are led by the interviewee and therefore they set the agenda (Thomas, 2013). The limitation of unstructured interviews is how the interviewee can change the topic and this forces the interviewer to steer the interview back on course (Thomas, 2013).

A face to face, semi-structured interview was selected as the most appropriate data collection method and was conducted with each of the six participants. Semi-structured interviews are flexible enough to develop points where required, while maintaining structure in the interview process (Thomas, 2011). Although semi-structured interviews allow flexibility, at the same time they should be directed as a “carefully controlled conversation” (Robson, 2007, p.74)

3.5.3 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview is conducted “on the basis of convenience, access, and geographic proximity” (Creswell, 2013, p.165). The researcher conducted a pilot interview on the 21st of December to review the structure of the interview. According to Merriam (2009), pilot interviews are essential as they allow the interviewer to refine the interview technique and questions. The interviewer gains experience in communicating the purpose of the interview to the participant and the location can be reviewed to assess if the physical setting is appropriate for an audio digital recording to be conducted (Creswell, 2013).

3.5.4 The Strengths of Semi-Structured Interviews

The strength of using semi-structured interviews is that it provides a methodical direction for participants, yet the interview remains primarily conversational (Cohen et al., 2011). Likewise, Thomas (2009) agrees that semi-structured interviews allow the author to keep their themes in mind without constricting the participants.

3.5.5 The Limitations of Semi-Structured Interviews

A disadvantage of interviews can be the desire of the participant to please the interviewer with their answers (Patton, 2002). The researcher must be aware throughout the interview process that they are a human instrument which is capable of being biased and subjective in the process (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). The researcher will do her utmost to make the participant feel at ease throughout the interview process.

3.5.6 Data Analysis

There were six interviews, lasting approximately thirty minutes each. Pseudonyms were used to protect each participant's anonymity. The data was collected using an audio digital recorder to record the semi-structured interviews and these were transcribed by the researcher for analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend that data analysis is done concurrently with data collection. The researcher included direct quotes from the participant interviews to back up the evidence and the literature review. The researcher used thematic analysis to explore reoccurring relationships or patterns in the data collected (Cohen et al., 2011). In using thematic analysis, the researcher listened to the transcripts. By doing this, the researcher was able to take notes on the common themes that arose. The advantage of the researcher transcribing the data was their ability to note nuances and content within the transcripts (see Appendix H).

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time prior to data analysis along with the right to confidentiality throughout the process (Creswell, 2013).

3.6 Validity and Reliability of Qualitative Research

Validity "tells us whether an item or instrument measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe" (Bell, 2010, p.119). The term validity relates to certain requirements with which research has to follow. "Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, p. 242). For validity purposes, it has been suggested that open-ended questions need to be asked in the interviews (Cohen et al. 2011).

The researcher assessed the content validity and appropriateness of various methods (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher had anticipated using two methods of data collection but due to their teaching position in the school, one method was suggested as the best option.

"Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable" (Bryman 2012, p.46). Bell (2010) suggests that questions for semi-structured interviews need to be carefully planned to mitigate the inclusion of leading questions which may lead to interview bias. The interviewees 'voice' needs to be truly reflected from their own perspective to enhance the validity of interviews and to avoid distortion (Punch, 2001). Yet, Bryman (2012) indicates that the use of open questions can result in a difference of opinions from participants, therefore making comparisons extra demanding. For this reason, the key questions were asked in the same sequence and worded uniformly for all participants to maximise reliability.

Some level of personal bias is inevitable due to the researcher's personal interest in the topic and eleven years teaching experience in this case study school. To counteract this, the researcher used a reflexive research diary to critically reflect on the experience and themes which emerge.

3.7 Positionality of Researcher

An interpretivist research requires the researcher to state their positionality (Thomas, 2013). The researcher has worked as a teacher in the case study school for the past eleven years. The researcher had a personal interest in the topic of transition from primary to post-primary school so that they could become more aware of the experiences that students have, but also to identify supports and strategies which the case study school can implement as a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the future. As the researcher is a teacher in the school, they chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with the parents of first year students to reduce the possibility of bias.

Research suggests that this was 'insider' research because the researcher played a role in the research location (Robson, 2007). The researcher is familiar with the research setting and the parents who were willing to participate in the research.

3.8 Reflexivity

This research study implemented a critical reflexive approach. Reflexivity is about becoming aware of how our history, thoughts and feelings inform us as we communicate with others (Etherington, 2004). It is essential for the researcher to describe their professional background, expectations and experience in conducting the research as a process of being transparent about any possible bias in the research (McLeod, 2010). Furthermore, reflexivity is gaining awareness of the dynamics concerning the researcher and the research participants. This self-awareness is the foundation of valid and ethical qualitative research (Gough and Finlay, 2003).

The researcher implemented a reflexive approach by using a research diary and note taking. The research diary was used to record my feelings and observations after each interview (See Appendix G). Each participant was reminded before the interview started that the researcher was conducting this interview as part of their research project. The researcher stated "I have my teacher hat off and this interview is confidential". The researcher feels that the participants were open in discussing their child's experience and were volunteering their time to support the school in implementing new strategies for first year students in the future.

The researcher was conscious of their role as a practitioner. At times the researcher felt conflicted in not providing advice, support or comments to the participants when they implied an answer as a question. The researcher's interest was in what the participant's knew, rather than the information they did not know. After the interviews were conducted, the researcher was aware of their role as a teacher to most of the participant's children.

Within research in guidance counselling, the researcher should be respectful, competent, trustworthy and accountable in their work (Culley and Bond, 2011; Havercamp, 2005; IGC, 2012; NCGE, 2008). The researcher applied all these qualities throughout the process.

3.9 Ethical Issues

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) proposed two ethical considerations in carrying out research. The first consideration is the procedural ethics which involves a request to an ethics committee to agree to the proposed research. The second ethical consideration is relative to the everyday ethical issues that can arise during the natural progression of the actual investigation (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

The researcher explored the transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of parents using a case study approach. McLeod (2010, p.54) claims that a case study design involves "a higher degree of moral risk than other methodologies" but with the creation of a "moral space in which effective inquiry can take place, in which all participants feel safe enough to make the maximum contribution to knowledge and understanding" (McLeod, 2010, p.55). The participants in the study were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any stage prior to data analysis.

The researcher was granted full ethical approval by the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limerick on the 17th of November, 2016.

All participants were made aware on the Parents/Guardians Subject Information Sheet (see Appendix D), that the interview would be audio digitally recorded for analysis purposes. The researcher conducted all interviews using pseudonyms to ensure full anonymity of all participants in the case study and their name was not written on any documentation relating to the research. The participant interviews were audio digital recorded. After each interview, the recording was transferred on to a password protected laptop and the recording was then deleted immediately from the recording device. The researcher transcribed each interview on to a password protected laptop. All data collected was stored in the Principal Investigator's office in a locked cabinet in the University of Limerick, where it will be stored for seven

years after which time it will then be destroyed. As outlined by Hearne (2013), participants were informed of the interview procedure before taking part in the research study. The researcher applied a duty of care and support to each participant as outlined in the Institute of Guidance Counsellor's Code of Ethics (2012) and was guided by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (2008) Research Code of Ethics.

Overall the researcher's aim was to gather information without making "rushed judgements which ignore important aspects of the situation, particularly ethical ones" (Swain, 2008, p.1).

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the primary and secondary research questions underpinning this research study. The chapter discussed qualitative research in terms of semi-structured interviews. It highlighted the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, this chapter explored the case study design, the method of data collection and how the researcher was going to access participants. Finally, this chapter discussed the validity, reliability and ethical issues in relation to this research study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the main findings from the data gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews with parents of first year post-primary school students. A range of predominant themes and sub-themes emerged from the data collected. The data collected from the participants illustrates their unique and individual experiences on the transition from primary to post-primary school for their son or daughter. The data collected also gives an insight into the positive and challenging experiences of first year students from one case study post-primary school.

4.1 Results from Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents of first year students. The interviews were conducted to gain an insight into how their son or daughter experienced the transition from primary to post-primary school. The interviews were analysed using a thematic approach through the use of coding and thematic mapping (Thomas, 2013). The researcher transcribed these interviews. Each recording was listened to repeatedly to enable the researcher become more aware of the language used by the participants and to hear the unique experiences described by each parent. The aim of data analysis is to foster the rich, illuminative words of the participants in exploring their unique experiences (Thomas, 2013). All of the participants were female and were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Table 4.1 identifies the pseudonyms of the participants, the gender of their child in first year and the position they hold in the family.

Pseudonyms of participants	Gender of child	Position of son/daughter in family
Ann	Male	Only child
Maeve	Male	Youngest
Marie	Female	Eldest child
Karen	Male	Third youngest
Mary	Female	Youngest
Rena	Male	Youngest

Table 4.1 provides demographic information on the participants

The following are the overarching themes that emerged from the data:

- (i) First Year Students' Experiences of Transitioning to Post-Primary School
- (ii) Post-Primary Transitioning Policy and Practice
- (iii) Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

4.2 First Year Students' Experiences of Transitioning to Post-Primary School

The transition experiences of first year students to post-primary school were illuminated in the data. Parents were open in describing their son or daughter's individual experiences throughout the transition; to include areas which they found positive or challenging. Interestingly, the experiences described can be divided into three sub-themes. These are:

- a) Organisational Experiences
- b) Personal and Social Experiences of Transitioning
- c) Adolescent Development

4.2.1 Organisational Experiences

All six participants described the personal experiences of their son or daughter. Some experiences were similar while other experiences were unique to their child moving to post-primary school. The experiences described by parents included the readiness of their son or daughter in moving from primary to secondary school, the use of the school locker, fitting into their new school environment, school subjects and using the school diary as a method of communication. One of the main concerns raised by most participants was their child's fear of getting lost due to the movement between classes.

Firstly, Karen acknowledged how her son found the experience of moving to post-primary school "*exciting in some aspects and difficult in other aspects*". In the midst of this transition period, Karen expressed how her son "*had outgrown primary school and the same routines*" and that he likes the "*the diversity of subjects, he likes the fact you move from one to the other and you are not doing the same thing all the time*". Likewise, Mary acknowledged that her daughter "*was ready to move on from primary school*".

As a result, Karen stated that first year students become the "*babies*" when they begin post-primary school. She expressed how "*they very much belong in primary school*" and she feels that one of the biggest challenges for first year students is "*to feel that they belong*" in post-primary school.

On the other hand, the movement to post-primary school is not always an easy transition as Rena's son found it to be a challenge when he was separated from his primary school friends.

They were put into a different class than him. Rena stated at the end of her son's first day in post-primary school, he came out to the car to say "*I've got the worst group, I don't know anyone*". Rena was exceptionally honest in describing how this experience "*sort of freaked him out a little bit*". Rena stated how "*stressed*" she was as a parent. She e-mailed the school principal over the weekend to see if her son could be moved. On Monday morning her son was moved to the same class as his primary school friends. Rena stated "*once he was moved, perfect*", this challenge had been resolved.

The fear Maeve's son had was "*around getting lost*". The movement between classes and becoming familiar with the post-primary school grounds is an organisational challenge that all first year students have to adapt to. Likewise, Mary expressed how her daughter found it "*a huge change from sitting in one classroom, to be moving around from A to B to C to D to E*". As a result of this adjustment, Mary stated that a base class "*maybe for the first year*" would be a way of alleviating this challenge.

Furthermore, Mary also acknowledged that "*adjusting to the timetable*" and "*all the books*" were other challenges experienced by her daughter. For this reason, Mary expressed that it took "*about 3 weeks*" for her daughter to settle in. Likewise, Rena stated "*I think it does take them up until Christmas to really settle*".

Another difference in the organisational structure as Mary acknowledged is "*the fact that they have so many subjects*". For this reason, Maeve prepared her son for the move to post-primary school by getting "*all the books in the folders with the zip so he has 12 packs*". Furthermore, Ann stated that her son was "*forgetting books in his locker, really we're still not great with the locker at the moment*" and established that this "*is part of the change from the primary school*". Ann also acknowledged that her son "*would be missing loads of the homework and I'd say to him 'Why didn't you write it down?'*" Additionally, Mary stated that her daughter also found the "*homework alright is a bit of an issue, as I suppose the fact that they have so many subjects*". Mary expressed she has it "*drilled into them to do their homework*" once they come home from school. This is a routine which Mary has implemented "*since they were in primary school*".

Another topic raised by the participants is the use of the school diary as a means of communication between home and school. Karen expressed how the school diary is a "*very good*" system. As a parent Karen checks it "*on a Sunday night and depending on what's in it, we have a discussion, a long discussion or a short discussion*". Furthermore, Marie acknowledged that the school diary is good for "*day to day things like homework, the diary*".

works well. It's good for keeping a check on small things". However, Marie stated that she would prefer a telephone call if a more *"urgent situation"* occurred involving her daughter. A positive aspect identified by participants in the case study school is the dedicated first year area. The first years have their own school corridor with their lockers and toilets. No other students can enter this section of the school during break and lunch times. Karen described this as *"they are part of the bigger environment but still confined to getting to know their own year"*. Similarly, Rena stated *"I think that is brilliant because they feel a lot more secure"*. For first year students the change in the organisational structure can be a challenge and it can take different lengths of time for students to adjust. The changes identified by the participants varied from feeling they belong to being separated from their primary school friends and adjusting to their new timetable and subjects. They also mentioned using their school locker, the school diary and finding the various classrooms.

4.2.2 Personal and Social Experiences of Transitioning

Four of the participants acknowledged that their son or daughter used words such as *'nervous', 'anxious', 'panic', 'fear'* and *'stress'* to describe their transition into post-primary school. Marie acknowledged that her daughter was *"nervous"* before starting post-primary school but now *"she seems very happy with the new friends that she has met and she has mixed well"*.

Interestingly, these feelings were particularly expressed by participants where their son or daughter is the eldest in the family. Mary was interviewed about her youngest child's experience but reverted in the interview to the experience her eldest son had:

I'm probably the wrong person to be asking as she had such an easy transition. My first child was the hardest one. It's definitely harder when you are the first.

(Mary)

Equally, Karen described how her youngest child was *'excited'* and had *'no problems'* with the transition into post-primary school. Karen stated that this was due to him having an older brother and sister in post-primary school. Karen stated:

I think he was excited but that would be because of XXXX (brother) and XXXX (sister) encouraging him and talking to him and telling him things.

(Karen)

In spite of this, Maeve described the how her youngest child did not want to go to post-primary school. She acknowledged that:

He had a big fear and even though I have two girls who have been through the school so he had great opportunities to ask what would this or that be like.

(Maeve)

However, Maeve disclosed that her son has a special educational need called *"DCD which is better known as Dyspraxia"*. Maeve revealed that both her son and she found the transition

to post-primary school to be *“nerve racking for both of us but it has been good”, it’s been good”*.

However, since Maeve’s son has started post-primary school, he has expressed that his favourite part is the social aspect of school life. Maeve stated that *“he likes anything to do with break-times and PE. He will tell you the people and the friends are the best thing”*. Yet, he *“is struggling to know who is nice, who is not nice”*. An additional factor which affects the emotional aspect of the transition to post-primary school are friendships.

Karen stated that her son finds the number of students in first year a challenge and *“trying to find where he fits into all of that”*. Karen described how he is finding it hard to make friends in post-primary school. Karen’s son *“had one good friend”* in primary school and *“he hasn’t found that here”* because his friend moved to a different post-primary school. Karen described in her interview how *“even now I couldn’t say that he has a particular friend that he would gravitate to every day”*. What is more, Karen acknowledged that her son *“finds it hard to articulate his feelings. He would keep a lot of things in until he would blow”*. Karen acknowledged that this *“is a little bit”* of a worry for her but she is willing to *“see how it progresses”*.

Accordingly, Marie stated how crucial it is for students to have someone they can confide in if they are experiencing difficulties. Marie described how her daughter felt intimidated when she began post-primary school but this has since eased because she can talk to someone in her support system about how she is feeling:

She will come to me too if there’s a problem, we are quite close and if she wouldn’t, she has her cousins and friends to confide in, she has a great support system.

(Marie)

The personal and social experiences identified were varied especially when looking at the position a child holds in their family. One child who is the youngest in their family had an easy transition while two other students found it more challenging.

4.2.3 Adolescent Development

Firstly, Karen acknowledged that her son has become more influenced by his older brother’s opinions than his younger siblings. This is an aspect of adolescent behaviour where younger siblings take the direction of their older siblings or peers:

He recognises and sides more with the older brother now. I can see a change in him and he can see he is more grown up as a result of being in secondary school.

(Karen)

Additionally, Rena expressed how *“they have higher expectations of themselves”*, that they have *“to be good now”* because they are *“big”*. Furthermore, Maeve expressed how her

older daughters would “*come home and tell you everything*” but her son in first year “*tells me nothing*”. She also stated that her son “*had a girlfriend within two weeks*” of starting post-primary school and “*then he didn’t, all that’s going on for them*”.

In relation to the topic of bullying, Rena stated her son “*would take a long time before he would come to me*” because she sees him as a “*very sensitive little kid*” and “*he would tend to keep things bottled up*”. Similarly, Karen expressed how her son is “*quite a sensitive child*” and in relation to settling into post-primary school, she stated how “*temperament is a factor*”.

4.3 Post-Primary Transitioning Policy and Practice

In this research, a common topic discussed by participants was the different methods employed by the post-primary school to support incoming first year students. Participants identified the principal’s visit to the feeder primary schools, the open day, the introductory day, the information evening for first year parents and the taster programme as examples of the transition strategies used to support first year students.

The two main sub-themes to emerge from the data include:

- a) Informal Transition Programme
- b) Taster Programme

4.3.1 Informal Transition Programme

The transition process was identified by one parent as beginning in the September of 6th class, when the post-primary ‘*school principal visits*’ the local primary schools to meet pupils. The purpose of the visit is to invite 6th class pupils to the post-primary school open day. Karen expressed how this “*contact from the secondary school in their safe environment of the primary school was very important*”. What is more, Mary stated that the principal’s visit to the primary schools “*should continue*”. Furthermore, Karen acknowledged that the transition “*is a process that starts from when you come to the open day*”.

The parents of first year students are invited to an ‘*information evening*’ after the transition in September. Rena described the meeting as “*very good*”.

The school principal and assigned yearhead organise an informal ‘*transition programme*’ for first year students. With this in mind, Rena stated that as a parent of a first year student “*all you want....is that they are happy and that they get the chance to settle in*”.

Furthermore, Maeve stated how “*the first day, the introductory day changed everything*” for her son. First years were invited to take part in activities and the perk was “*they didn’t wear*

a uniform". As a result of this ***‘introductory day’***, Maeve expressed *“after that there was never going to be a problem”* from her son’s point of view and *“he was quite happy not to be around the people he had been with before”*.

On the other hand, Maeve expressed how there was a lack of basic information available to her before her son began post-primary school. Similarly, Ann added that as part of a transition programme, the school could gather information from the students to find out how they have settled in. She expressed that questions like *“what are you afraid of?”* and *“what are you looking forward to?”* could be asked *“to get a feeling for where they are coming from”*. Also, Ann stated that having a formal *“transition programme might help them to understand or learn a bit more about each other”*. Additionally, Marie suggested that *“topics like bullying and reinforce social media, safety”* could also be covered as part of a formal transition programme. Furthermore, Maeve expressed that first year students with a special educational need or students who are not of Irish nationality *“do need that bit extra... just to check in”*. She acknowledged that they could be asked to fill in a questionnaire with questions like *“What’s the hardest about being here?”* and *“what’s the easiest thing about being here?”* or *“What would you change?”* Maeve expressed how this would help students with special educational needs to have a *“voice, their voice is very much overpowered sometimes”* thus, expressing that children with *“additional needs...they are almost a silent group”*. Overall, parents were positive in their responses about the principal’s visit to the feeder primary schools, the open day, the introductory day and information evening.

4.3.2 Taster Programme

A topic discussed by participants was the experience their son or daughter had during the subject options taster session. First year students got the opportunity to try all eight subject options available for the Junior Certificate assessment. Each choice subject is offered for a period of two weeks, after which time, first year students complete a form selecting the subjects they wish to study for their Junior Certificate. Interestingly, all six participants stated that they left the decision to their son or daughter to choose which subjects they wanted to study. Karen described how her son *“is now doing Art”* as a result of taking part in the subject options. Initially, her son *“chose Woodwork”* because his older brother *“had done it”*. Her son *“is happier”* now that he is studying Art and this is a result of him taking part in the subject options taster session.

One advantage for first year students taking part in the subject options taster session is the insight it gives them into the subject content for the Junior Certificate. Rena expressed how

her son thought he would be “*cooking all the time*” in Home Economics. When he realised he would not be, “*he decided on Woodwork instead*”. While Marie acknowledged that:

I’ve been very happy with how she has settled in and how she has progressed and the amount of study, her results, academically she is doing very well.

(Marie)

There was a consensus amongst participants to continue with the subject options for first year students in the future.

4.4 Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

A whole school approach to guidance counselling in post-primary school was a predominant theme that emerged from the data. In this section, the role of the guidance counsellor, yearhead and teachers were acknowledged by parents as supporting structures which are in place to assist the transition of students into first year.

4.4.1 Role of Guidance Counsellor

Firstly, all of the participants agreed that first year students should be allocated a guidance class on their timetable with topics like ‘*study skills*’, ‘*subject options*’, ‘*bullying*’ and ‘*healthy relationships*’ to be taught by the guidance counsellor. Karen expressed how:

Career guidance is something that’s a gradual process built up over the years that the child is here so that when it comes to 5th year or 6th year, it’s not a new introduction.

(Karen)

Furthermore, Karen acknowledged that students have five or six years in secondary school “*before they make a decision that will affect the rest of their lives*” therefore allocating a class from first year assists them in developing a rapport with the guidance counsellor. Karen also stated that “*whatever college course you pick, most likely statistics show, most likely will be your career for life*”.

In spite of this, both Maeve and Karen identified the need for the role of the guidance counsellor to be clarified to parents. Maeve stated “*what is their role as I’m not always sure myself*”. However, Rena saw the role of a guidance counsellor “*as a point of contact for the students if they have any concerns, a little bit of safe ground to go to*”. While Mary’s opinion of guidance counselling is:

I suppose the guidance counselling is more important in 5th and 6th year if, from my point of view in guiding them in the right road to take for themselves but for 1st, 2nd year and 3rd year, I suppose choice of subjects has a lot to do with that.

(Mary)

Likewise, Marie is a new parent who stated that “*guidance counselling I think is going to be important in 5th and 6th year*”. However, Marie stated that “*there is a more holistic approach now and the guidance counsellor is more than just what college course you’re doing*”.

While there were strong opinions on the role of guidance counselling in 5th and 6th year, parents are not fully aware of the role guidance counsellors have in supporting first year students during the transition from primary school.

4.4.2 Yearhead

Another aspect of the whole school approach which emerged is the role of the yearhead. Ann described the yearhead as someone “*very caring*” and “*easy to talk to, I got good advice*”. Likewise, Mary stated that the yearhead is “*brilliant*”. Similarly, Marie described the yearhead as a person she finds “*very approachable*”. Additionally, Marie described how her daughter “*seems to have bonded*” with the yearhead. Marie sounded happy when she expressed:

What I like is that she will have the same yearhead all the way through. I think that’s very important. I love that structure and that this is the one person who will be with you all the way to Leaving Cert.

(Marie)

Likewise, Ann expressed that she had an issue in relation to her son. Ann sought support from the yearhead and it was “*dealt with it straightaway*”. She described how she trusted the yearhead and how “*a good yearhead helps a lot*”.

Furthermore, Rena stated that she would contact the principal and Maeve stated that “*I’d probably just ring the secretary and ask her*”. Overall, three of the participants said they would contact the yearhead if they had an issue concerning their son or daughter.

4.4.3 Teachers

Firstly, Ann stated “*there is a good bit of flexibility*” from teachers as she acknowledged her son “*was doing all sorts of things*”. Equally, Karen expressed that “*the teachers are understanding of the transition for them and do give a little leeway at the beginning*”. Furthermore, Karen acknowledged that teachers “*need to be patient, understanding, and they need to give the time to get to know the students*”. What is more, Karen expressed that:

I think it’s important that the bond between the teacher and the student and the student and the teacher is made in first year because in a sense it’s a little bit late doing it later on.

(Karen)

Rena acknowledged the support from teachers by stating “*the teachers said to come to them if there was a problem*”. Likewise, Mary attended the recent parent teacher meeting for first year students. She expressed how “*the teachers are very good with them*”. Further into the interview Mary expressed that even though her daughter has no problems with her teachers she did acknowledge:

If she had a teacher she wasn’t happy with or working with it would drive her back. That would affect her with the other subjects too.

(Mary)

What is more, Marie discussed the different teaching styles that her daughter is experiencing by stating that her daughter “*is learning from some and some she is finding difficult to learn from*”. Marie also expressed how her daughter is comparing the teaching style of her 6th class teacher to the varied teaching styles of her new secondary school teachers. A teaching style she is currently experiencing is being taught how to learn independently and reading ahead in their course work before the teacher explains it. Marie likes this teaching style as students are “*learning to research on their own and form their own opinions*” even though her daughter ‘*is not happy*’ with it. Furthermore, in relation to the whole school approach Marie acknowledged that:

Not every teacher can be a guidance counsellor, not just because they are not trained to be guidance counsellors but because they all have different opinions and you can confuse a child very, very easily.

(Marie)

Additionally, Maeve acknowledged that “*from my experience it seems to be very, very much a holistic approach*” and that this school “*aren’t just caring about the activities, kids are always smiling*”.

4.4.4 Parental Involvement in the Transition

All participants were asked in their interviews about what they viewed their role as in preparing their son or daughter for the transition into post-primary school. This brought a variety of responses as some are new parents, while others have older children in post-primary.

Firstly, Karen stated that she sees her role as “*crucial*” and the process of preparing her son for post-primary school started with attending the open day. She stated it is “*very important that the parents are on-board and fully involved in the process*”. Moreover, Marie stated her role as a parent is as follows:

I suppose advise and support her, ask her to try her hardest. I would fear that a child would put themselves under more pressure than the parent would put them under.

(Marie)

Likewise, Maeve believes her role “*is to reassure, encourage and take the fear out of it*” and with her son she tried to focus on “*all the people you will know*”. Furthermore, Maeve expressed that for PE class “*I made sure he had the right clothes....I feel he has enough to contend with*”. Overall, parents saw their role as offering advice, reassuring their child, attending the open day and buying the necessary items for school.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings from the data collected through semi-structured interviews. The data was presented under significant themes and sub-themes.

The data analysis presents an in-depth description of the data and highlights a number of key issues pertinent to the research topic. In chapter five, the primary data analysis and findings are discussed relative to previous research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical discussion of the predominant themes which emerged from the research findings. The primary questions of the study include ‘what are the experiences of first year students who transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of parents?’ Furthermore, ‘how does guidance counselling and a whole school approach assist first year students to settle into post-primary school?’ The research gathered through semi-structured interviews with parents/guardians revealed the experience that their son or daughter had on the transition from primary to post-primary school. The following are the predominant themes that emerged from the data collected:

- (iv) First Year Students’ Experiences of Transitioning to Post-Primary School
- (v) Post-Primary Transitioning Policy and Practice
- (vi) Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

This chapter will examine the three key themes and the ethical considerations of the study and discuss them in conjunction with the findings from previous literature.

5.1 First Year Students’ Experiences of Transitioning to Post-Primary School

Firstly, the transition to post-primary school has been defined as follows:

Transition from primary to secondary school is seen as an important crossroad as young people move from a small, self-contained classroom to a large, more heterogeneous school with increased expectation of independent academic performance and less teachers’ scaffolding.

(Hanewald, 2013, p.64)

Mellor and Delamont (2011) indicated that in Ireland and abroad, young people share many similar anxieties and fears when they make the transition from primary to post-primary school. In this research study, Karen expressed how her son found the transition to post-primary school “*exciting in some aspects and difficult in other aspects*”.

Smyth et al. (2004) indicated that it takes longer than one month for 14 per cent of first year students to settle into post-primary school. From this research, it took Mary’s youngest daughter “*about 3 weeks*” to settle into first year. Similarly, Rena expressed how “*I think it does take them up until Christmas to really settle*”.

Smyth et al. (2004) evidence suggests that knowing somebody or having an older brother or sister in the secondary school can have a positive impact on how first year students adjust to their new environment. This was highlighted in this research study when Karen expressed that her son “*was excited*” about starting post-primary school because he had an older brother

and sister “*encouraging him and talking to him and telling him things*”. Similarly, Mary acknowledged that her youngest daughter “*had such an easy transition*” but she did revert to how her eldest child found the transition to post-primary school by stating “*my first child was the hardest one, it’s definitely harder when you are the first*”. Rice (2001) evidence suggests that having an older sibling in post-primary school helps to facilitate a successful transition for younger siblings. Also, having a positive rapport with an older sibling supports the knowledge and information that the younger sibling receives (Anderson et al., 2000).

Marie acknowledged that since her eldest daughter started post-primary school in September, she “*has her cousins and friends to confide in, she has a great support system*”.

While there is apprehension during this period of change, research has found that young people feel ready to move to post-primary school as they may have outgrown their primary school (Mellor and Delamont, 2011). Mary described how her daughter “*was ready to move on from primary school*”. Likewise, Karen stated that her son “*had outgrown primary school and the same routines*”.

Previous research indicated that girls express more fear than boys in relation to the transition to post-primary school (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; O’Brien, 2001). In this research study, this was true for Marie’s daughter. Marie stated that her daughter was feeling “*nervous*” before starting post-primary school while on the other hand, Mary expressed that “*I’m probably the wrong person to be asking as she had such an easy transition*”.

Weller (2007) identified that the transition to post-primary can bring about a change in friendship formation. One major fear for young people can be the loss of old friendships and the formation of new friendships caused by the transition (Pratt and George, 2005; Rice et al., 2011; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Nonetheless, Marie acknowledged that her daughter “*seems very happy with the new friends that she has met and she has mixed well*”. Similarly, Maeve stated that her son “*will tell you the people and the friends are the best thing*” about post-primary school.

However, Karen’s son had a different experience. He “*had one good friend*” in primary school and “*he hasn’t found that yet here*” as his primary school friend moved to a different post-primary school. Hence, Karen acknowledged during her interview that “*even now I couldn’t say that he has a particular friend that he would gravitate to every day*”. This research finding contrasts with that found in prior research studies. It was identified that young people feel less social seclusion after the transition to post-primary school, despite the disruption which can occur to friendships (Gillison et al., 2008; Smyth, 2016a). Toppings (2011) indicated that peer support can improve feelings of anxiety about the transition.

From the findings that emerged as a result of the data collected during this research study, the experiences of incoming first year students were divided into three sub-themes:

1. Organisational Experiences
2. Personal and Social Experiences of Transitioning
3. Adolescent Development

5.1.1 Organisational Experiences

Characteristically, the move to post-primary school includes adapting to a new school size and environment, an increase in academic expectations and developing new peer relationships (Darmody, 2008).

Research suggests that students transitioning from primary to post-primary school were commonly concerned about getting lost in the new school environment, finding the academic work harder and thus achieving lower academic grades along with the worry of being bullied by older students (Qualter et al., 2007; Rice et al., 2011). Research findings from this case study conducted with six participants found similar results where words such as *'nervous'*, *'anxious'*, *'panic'*, *'fear'* and *'stress'* were used to describe their child's transition to post-primary school.

The most common fear expressed by the participants was *"around getting lost"*. As Mary outlined, her daughter experienced *"a huge change from sitting in one classroom to be moving around from A to B to C to D to E"*. Mary would have acknowledged that her daughter had no problem or issues when she moved to post-primary school.

Anderson et al. (2000) indicated that "preparedness" is an essential factor in assisting with the transition. Preparedness is a multifaceted concept that encompasses independence and diligence to conform to adult standards as well as academic preparedness and coping mechanisms. This indicates that more support is needed for first year students who experience lower levels of preparedness. Ann acknowledged that *"part of the change from primary school"* was her son *"forgetting books in his locker, really we're still not great with the locker at the moment"*. Furthermore, Ann stated that the transition from primary to post-primary school is a time *"to allow what they have learned already to develop and to continue"*. Research suggests that where links are created between the primary and post-primary, this eases the transition for students as they are more aware of what to expect when they move schools (Evangelou et al., 2008).

Currently, the DES are reforming the Junior Cycle to see a wider offering of subjects to students and where active learning, innovation and creativity are promoted (DES, 2014). In

previous research, Darmody (2008) indicated that the increase in subjects at post-primary level hindered the settling in process for first year students. Yet, in this research study, Karen stated that her son enjoys *“the diversity of subjects, he likes the fact you move from one to the other and you are not doing the same thing all the time”*. However, Mary did acknowledge that first year students *“have so many subjects”*. While, Marie expressed:

I've been very happy with how she has settled in and how she has progressed and the amount of study, her results, academically she is doing very well.

(Marie)

In relation to academic experiences, all first year students participate in a subject options taster session which lasts for eight weeks at the beginning of first year. After the taster session, first year students then choose what subjects they wish to study for their Junior Certificate. This research study highlighted that all six participants left the subject choice decision to their child. Karen acknowledged that her son initially *“choose Woodwork”* because his older brother *“had done it”*. As a result of subject options taster session, he is now studying Art which *“he is happier”* about. Another benefit of first year students taking part in the subject options is the insight it gives them into subject content for the Junior Certificate. Rena stated her son perceived Home Economics to be *“cooking all the time”*. When he realised that this was not the case, *“he decided on Woodwork instead”*.

The DES (2009) revealed in their *‘Looking at Guidance’* document that 48% of students surveyed at Junior Cycle had chosen their subject options before starting post-primary school. While 60% of students did not get an opportunity to try any of the subject options before they chose the subjects they would study for their Junior Certificate.

All of the participants in this research study were in favour of continuing the subject options taster sessions in the future.

5.1.2 Personal and Social Experiences

Karen expressed how first year students become the *“babies”* when they start post-primary school. She outlines how young people feel *“they very much belong in primary school”*. Karen acknowledged that one of the main challenges for first year students is *“to feel that they belong”* in post-primary school. The social repositioning from being the eldest in primary school to becoming the youngest in post-primary school has been shown to cause feelings of loss in navigating their way socially (Smyth, 2016b). Karen, a parent in this research study, expressed that her son is *“trying to find where he fits into all of that”*. While, Gerner and Wilson (2005) revealed that adolescence is a stage where students typically place an excessive ranking on being socially accepted. However, the characteristics and quality of

peer friendships can affect a young person's academic progress and psychosocial development. Little investigation has been done on the effect of friendship stability (Poulin and Chan, 2010). One aspect of moving to post-primary school that Maeve's son enjoys is *"anything to do with break-times and PE, he will tell you the people and the friends are the best thing"*. Yet, in spite of this, Maeve recognised how her son *"is struggling to know who is nice, who is not nice"*. Maeve also discussed her son's special educational need. He has *"DCD which is better known as Dyspraxia"* and revealed that the transition was *"nerve racking for both of us but it has been good", it's been good"*. Though, Maeve has two older children in secondary school, her son *"didn't want to go to secondary school"* expressing how *"he really had a big fear..... I think it was just the fear of the unknown"*. Maeve highlighted that for her son *"the first day, the introductory day changed everything"* and she describes how now *"he seems to have a wider scope of friends"*. Research conducted on the transition for SEN students revealed that coordination between the primary and post-primary school is required to ensure support is available to meet their individual needs (NCSE, 2013).

5.1.3 Adolescent Development

As Hamman and Hendricks (2005) highlighted, young people are discovering their self-definition and beliefs during adolescence which can often be seen as a stage of rebellion. Findings from this research study reveal that Karen's son *"recognises and sides more with the older brother now"* and she can *"see a change in him and he can see he is more grown up as a result of being in secondary school"*. It has been suggested that adolescent social behaviour moves away from dependence on parents to an increase in dependence on friends (Collins and Laursen, 2004, as cited in Bokhorst et al., 2010). While, Smith (2006) suggests that the quality of peer relationships can be one of the strongest indicators of both current and future mental health in students.

According to Erikson's Psychoanalytic Theory, adolescents are experiencing the fifth developmental stage known as 'Identity versus Identity Confusion' at a time when they are experiencing puberty and the transition to post-primary school (Steinberg, 1999).

Adeyemo (2005) indicated that where adolescents have a high level of emotional intelligence, this contributes to an easier social and academic transition. In this research, Rena acknowledged that from the experience of her sons, she expressed how adolescents *"have higher expectations of themselves"*. They feel they have *"got to be good now"* because they are *"big"*. Likewise, Maeve stated that her daughters would *"come home and tell you everything"*. Maeve's son in first year *"tells me nothing"*. Furthermore, Maeve expressed

that her son “*had a girlfriend within two weeks*” of beginning post-primary school and described how “*then he didn’t*” and she recognised “*all that’s going on for them*”. The findings from this research study and previous research have co-related evidence regarding adolescent development.

5.2 Post-Primary Transitioning Policy and Practice

The following section will discuss an informal transition programme and a taster programme. It will highlight the findings from this research along with previous research in relation to these two programmes.

5.2.1 Informal Transition Programme

Schools are beginning to view the transfer from primary to secondary school as a stage of distinct importance in the lives of young people (O’Brien, 2004). It is suggested that the main sources of contact between the post-primary school and incoming first year students are an open day or evening for both parents and students, visits to the feeder primary schools and an information brochure about the post-primary school (Smyth et al., 2004). Karen also acknowledged how this “*contact from the secondary school in their safe environment of the primary school was very important*”. Furthermore, Mary outlined why the principal visit to the feeder primary schools “*should continue*”.

Both the NGF (2007) and NCCA (2005) have indicated that the guidance counsellor plays a key role in assisting incoming first year students during the transition process. Furthermore, evidence suggests that transition programmes have been effective in decreasing students’ fears about the transition to post-primary school (Bloyce and Frederickson, 2012; Carmen et al., 2011).

Findings from this research suggest the introduction of a formal transition programme. Ann expressed that it might help first year students “*to understand or learn a bit more about each other*”. Similarly, Ann stated that after the transition in to first year, students could be asked questions like “*what are you afraid of?*” and “*what are you looking forward to?*” in order “*to get a feeling for where they are coming from*”. This was also acknowledged by Maeve, to include children with special educational needs and foreign national students.

What is more, Maeve stated that first year students with a special educational need or those who are not of Irish nationality “*do need that bit extra... just to check in*”. Maeve outlined that SEN students need a “*voice, their voice is very much overpowered sometimes*” thus, expressing that children with “*additional needs...they are almost a silent group*”. It may

take SEN students a number of school terms to successfully partake in new course material, therefore they may require additional support to adapt to their new school environment (DES, 2004). Furthermore, the DES (2005) explicitly mentioned that post-primary schools need to develop support structures for SEN students.

5.2.2 Taster Programme

Previous research identified that 48% of students surveyed chose their subject options before they commenced post-primary school, while 60% of students did not get an opportunity to try the subject options before choosing which ones they would study for their Junior Certificate.

In this research study all of the participants acknowledged the experience their son or daughter had in taking part in the subject options taster sessions. For the first eight weeks of first year, students got the opportunity to experience each of the subject options.

After which time, first year students had to choose which subjects they were going to study for their Junior Certificate. Karen, one of the participants, acknowledged that her son “*is happier*” now that he is studying Art and this is a result of him taking part in the subject options taster session. Overall, there was a consensus amongst parents for the taster programme to continue for first year students in the future.

5.3 Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

Guidance counselling in post-primary schools encompasses seven key elements including assessment, information, advice, counselling, referral, educational development programmes, personal and social development programmes (NCGE, 2004). Guidance counselling enables students to gain maximum value as it has been found to be a necessary support to contribute in a positive manner to our employment sector and economy where it has been linked to achieving social equity and justice (DES, 2005; McCarthy, 2012; OECD, 2004).

5.3.1 Role of Guidance Counsellor

Findings from this research study acknowledged that students have either five or six years in post-primary school “*before they make a decision that will affect the rest of their lives*”. What is more, Karen also stated that “*whatever college course you pick, most likely statistics show, most likely will be your career for life*”. For this reason she suggested that first year students should be allocated a guidance class to develop a rapport with the guidance counsellor. Yet, there appears to be more of an emphasis being placed on guidance counselling to Transition, 5th and 6th Year students to prepare them for working life or further

education (DES, 2009; McCoy et al., 2014; McCoy et al., 2006). Furthermore, the DES (1998) indicated that post-primary schools are obliged to provide ‘appropriate guidance’ to all students.

It was evident from the interviews that the participants were clear on the role a guidance counsellor plays in assisting 5th and 6th year students in career and vocational counselling. Mary acknowledged that “*guidance counselling is more important in 5th and 6th year*”, and from her “*point of view in guiding them in the right road to take for themselves*”. She viewed the role of a guidance counsellor in “*1st, 2nd year and 3rd year*” as to assist students with their “*choice of subjects*”. Yet Maeve, as a parent with two older children, expressed “*what is their role as I’m not always sure myself*”. However, Marie acknowledged that “*there is a more holistic approach now and the guidance counsellor is more than just what college course you’re doing*”. The participants were unsure about the role of guidance counsellors in relation to Junior Cycle students.

Previous research by Bimrose (2006) advocates the significance of communication in the professional identity of guidance counsellors. It was revealed that schools varied widely in the nature of the guidance counsellor’s role and therefore due to this lack of clarity, many inconsistencies have arisen in the content and provision of guidance programmes (McCoy et al., 2006).

The area of a whole school approach to guidance counselling has the key aim of developing a students’ personal, social and emotional growth (Lohrmann et al., 2008). While both Hearne and Galvin (2014) and the DES (2005) indicated that a guidance counsellor works in collaboration with management and staff to provide a whole school approach. Similarly, it has been highlighted that guidance as a whole school approach needs to permeate the curriculum, receive strong support and be delivered in a collaborative manner (DES, 2012; DES, 2005; IGC, 2008).

A fundamental area in this research study was the supports that assist first year students as they transition from primary to post-primary school. The findings also outline how the guidance counsellor plays a vital role in supporting first year students by covering topics such as ‘*study skills*’, ‘*subject options*’, ‘*bullying*’ and ‘*healthy relationships*’. While Rena acknowledged a guidance counsellor “*as a point of contact for the students if they have any concerns, a little bit of safe ground to go to*”.

Kidd (2006) indicated several benefits to the support received by first year students from guidance counsellors during the transition process. Guidance counsellors can support first year students by offering solutions in dealing with psychological issues which may affect

their studies. Secondly, guidance counsellors can assist students in their new school environment by getting them to appreciate those around them which helps them to live in harmony (Kidd, 2006).

The participants interviewed as part of this research study agreed that the guidance counsellor, yearhead and teachers provide a 'holistic' and 'caring' approach in supporting incoming first year students.

5.3.2 Yearhead

The most valued support that parents seek in relation to their son or daughter is that of the yearhead. In post-primary school teachers can be promoted to yearhead duties. This is a role in middle management where they collaborate with school management, staff, colleagues, parents and outside agencies to promote student wellbeing (JMB, 2014).

In this research study, the yearhead was described by Ann as "*very caring*" and "*easy to talk to and I got good advice*". Similarly, Mary acknowledged that the yearhead is "*brilliant*". Also, Marie finds the yearhead "*very approachable*". Furthermore, Marie described how her daughter has "*bonded*" with the yearhead and that "*she will have the same yearhead all the way through*" which she feels is "*very important*". Marie stated "*I love that structure and that this is the one person who will be with you all the way to Leaving Cert*". Similarly, Ann acknowledged that she trusted her and "*a good yearhead helps a lot*". However, previous research by Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) indicated that students find it more difficult to form a secure attachment with a teacher due to the increase in both student and teacher numbers.

Smyth et al. (2004) highlighted that the yearhead and class tutor systems were rated highly by principals who acknowledged their role as the most important in terms of information and support to first year students to support them while integrating into post-primary school.

While the support of the yearhead was evident in the findings from the participant interviews, the class tutor system was not mentioned by any participant in the interviews. Yearheads provide personal and social guidance through their role in supporting students in a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne et al., 2016b).

5.3.3 Teachers

It has been acknowledged that 'regular teachers' can play a key role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne and Galvin, 2014). Furthermore, Morgan and

Hertzog (2001) indicated that next to guidance counsellors, teachers are the most important influence in facilitating and achieving a successful transition programme in a school.

The support of teachers in assisting incoming first year students to settle into post-primary school was evident from the data collected. Karen outlined that *“the teachers are understanding of the transition for them and do give a little leeway at the beginning”*. Furthermore, Karen expressed that teachers *“need to be patient, understanding, and they need to give the time to get to know the students”*. With a WSA to guidance, it has been emphasised that students have a positive experience when there is an affirmative student-teacher connection (NEWB, 2008; Lam and Hui, 2010). This positive relationship between students and teachers was highlighted when Mary stated that if her daughter *“had a teacher she wasn’t happy with or working with it would drive her back”* and she expressed that this *“would affect her with the other subjects too”*. Furthermore, Marie stated:

Not every teacher can be a guidance counsellor, not just because they are not trained to be guidance counsellors but because they all have different opinions and you can confuse a child very, very easily.

(Marie)

A study conducted by the ERSI (Smyth, 2015) indicated that the quality of teacher-student relationships can impact on students’ engagement in school work, their academic achievement, their level of disciplinary difficulties and also their socio-emotional wellbeing.

Research has stressed that significant change occurs in the nature of teacher relationships due to the movement from one class teacher to having different teachers for each subject (McLaughlin and Clarke, 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Lam and Hui (2010) indicated from their research that regular teachers identified their role as being a guide, caregiver, friend, role model and coach in their relationship with students. On the other hand, regular teachers considered guidance counselling to be territory covered by experts (Finney, 2006).

Research by O’Brien (2004) indicated that that 95 per cent of students had a positive opinion of their teachers whereas research by Smyth et al. (2004) indicated that only 61 per cent of students had a positive opinion.

5.3.4 Parental Involvement in the Transition

As part of a whole school approach to guidance counselling, parents were recognised as having an important role in the development of the school guidance plan (DES, 2005). Smyth’s (2016a) evidence indicates that parents play a vital role in supporting their children to adjust to their secondary school. Research has indicated that where the parent-child relationship is positive, these young people usually have fewer transitional concerns than those whose relationship with their parents is one of conflict (Smyth, 2016a).

Smyth et al. (2004) outlined in their research that when incoming first year students and their parents make contact with their chosen secondary school, it helps decrease anxiety amongst children.

Rice et al. (2015) suggest that parents can support their children by checking their homework diary, by clarifying that they understand what is asked of them and by encouraging them to start their homework early.

In this research study, Ann acknowledged that her son *“would be missing loads of the homework and I’d say to him ‘Why didn’t you write it down?’”*

Similarly, Mary expressed how she has implemented a homework routine for her children *“since they were in primary school”*. She has it *“drilled into them to do their homework”* as soon as they are home from school. Lastly, Maeve prepared her son for the increase in the number of subjects by arranging *“all the books in the folders with the zip so he has 12 packs”*. In relation to PE she expressed how *“I would make sure he had the right clothes....I feel he has enough to contend with”*.

All parents revealed the role they played in preparing their son or daughter for post-primary school from providing advice, to attending the open day and purchasing school items. The findings of this research study are similar to findings in previous research.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

Firstly, the researcher completed the Research Ethics Application Form and received approval to begin the research study from the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limerick. The researcher is bound by the ethical principles set out by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors Code of Ethics (2012) and the National Centre for Guidance in Education Research Code of Ethics (2008) while conducting this research study. The researcher abided by the duty of care outlined in documents to protect their integrity (IGC, 2012; NCGE, 2008).

The Principal Subject Information Sheet, Principal Consent Form, Chairperson of Parents Council Subject Information Sheet, Parent/Guardian Subject Information Sheet, Parent/Guardian Consent Form and Interview Schedule can be found in Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F.

Furthermore, the researcher undertook reflexivity in the form of note-taking and completing a research diary in order to address concerns linked to their practitioner researcher position in this study.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the three predominant themes that emerged from the research study with six parents to obtain their perceptions on the transition from primary to post-primary school experienced by their son or daughter. A critique on the transition from primary to post-primary school was conducted through an analysis of literature and research findings.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conclusion in consideration of the aims and objectives of this research study. It also presents the strengths and limitations of the study and addresses a number of implications for future policy and practice. Furthermore, this chapter proposes numerous recommendations informed by the primary research findings and previous literature. Finally, the researcher will present a reflexive summary centred on their experience of the study.

6.1 Summary of Findings

The main aim of this research study was to explore the transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of first year parents. Furthermore, to examine a whole school approach to guidance counselling including a review of the role guidance counsellors, teachers and parents play in supporting incoming first year students.

A case study design was considered an appropriate framework as the research study focused on the real-life experiences of the transition into post-primary school. A qualitative method of data collection was chosen where semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents of first year students. The themes that emerged from the findings were as follows:

- (vii) First Year Students' Experiences of Transitioning to Post-Primary School
- (viii) Post-Primary Transitioning Policy and Practice
- (ix) Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

6.1.1 First Year Students' Experiences of Transitioning to Post-Primary School

The transitional experiences of first year students that emerged were divided into three sub-themes entitled: Organisational Experiences, Personal and Social Experiences of Transitioning and Adolescent Development.

Organisational Experiences

There are numerous organisational differences identified in the findings between primary and post-primary school. Research has indicated that common concerns students have about moving to post-primary school are in relation to finding their way around their new school grounds, their academic achievement and a fear of bullying from older students (Qualter et al., 2007; Rice et al., 2011).

This research study revealed that the most common fear acknowledged by parents was in relation to their child *“getting lost”* in their new school. Also, Ann expressed that *“part of the change from primary school”* was her son *“forgetting books in his locker, really we’re still not great with the locker at the moment”*. Anderson et al. (2000) indicated that “preparedness” is a vital factor in supporting transition. Preparedness is a multi-layered concept which includes independence and diligence. If a student’s level of independence and diligence is low, this leads to a greater amount of support required for the transition.

Research conducted by Darmody (2008) highlighted that the increase in subjects at post-primary level hindered the settling in period for first year students. Though, findings from this research study found that Karen expressed how her son enjoys *“the diversity of subjects, he likes the fact you move from one to the other and you are not doing the same thing all the time”*.

All parents spoke about the taster session offered to first year students to help them choose what subjects they wish to study for their Junior Certificate. All parents were supportive of this strategy and would like to see it continued in the future. The Department of Education and Skills are currently reforming the Junior Certificate to offer a wider range of subjects through short courses to students where innovation, creativity and active learning is encouraged (DES, 2014).

Personal and Social Experiences of Transitioning

One concern about moving to post-primary school was around friendship and belonging. As Karen acknowledged, first year students become the *“babies”* when they commence post-primary school and that *“they very much belong in primary school”*. She stated that a challenge for first year students is *“to feel that they belong”* in post-primary school. Gerner and Wilson (2005) identified adolescence as a stage where students usually place an extreme ranking on being socially accepted. Another aspect of the movement to post-primary school is the concern about friendships. Research indicates that the quality and characteristics of peer friendships can impact a young person’s psychosocial development and academic progress, however little investigation has been conducted on the effects on friendship stability (Poulin and Chan, 2010). One parent, Maeve, acknowledged that her son’s favourite part of secondary school is that *“he will tell you the people and the friends are the best thing”*. However, Karen acknowledged that her son *“had one good friend”* in primary school but *“he hasn’t found that yet here”* as his friend moved to a different post-primary school. First year

students had both positive and challenging social experiences brought about by the transition to post-primary school.

Adolescent Development

Evidence gathered from parents in this research study identifies the different experiences their son or daughter had in relation to adolescent development. Hamman and Hendricks (2005) describe it as a stage of rebellion due to the discovery of adolescent's self-definition and beliefs. Parents acknowledged the changes which they can see in their child since they began post-primary school. Karen's son sides with his older brother and she can see how he is *"more grown up as a result of being in secondary school"*. It is a stage where adolescent social behaviour moves away from dependence on parents to an increased dependence on friends (Collins and Laursen, 2004, as cited in Bokhorst et al., 2010). Rena acknowledged that adolescents *"have higher expectations of themselves"* because they are *"big"*. Maeve mentioned another area in relation to her son. He *"had a girlfriend within two weeks"* of beginning post-primary school and *"then he didn't"*. Maeve recognised *"all that's going on for them"*. Adolescent development has been identified as Erikson's fifth developmental stage which is known as 'Identity versus Identity Confusion' (Steinberg, 1999). Findings from this research show a wide-range of experiences and identify different levels of adolescent development.

6.1.2 Post-Primary Transitioning Policy and Practice

In this section parents mainly discussed the open day and transition programme in their interviews. Research conducted by Smyth et al. (2004) identified events such as an open day or evening for parents and students, visits to the feeder primary schools and an information booklet as the main contact points between the secondary school and incoming first year students. This research emphasised the open day and the visit to the primary schools. As Karen acknowledged *"contact from the secondary school in their safe environment of the primary school was very important"*. All participants discussed how the principal visit to the feeder primary schools, the open day, the introductory day and the parent information evening helped to ease the anxiety of their son or daughter and clarify answers to questions that parents had.

International studies conducted into transition programmes indicate their effectiveness in reducing students' concerns about the transition to post-primary school (Bloyce and Frederickson, 2012; Carmen et al., 2011). Ann acknowledged that a transition programme

could help students “*to understand or learn a bit more about each other*”. Maeve expressed how the introductory day helped her son to settle in and it “*changed everything*”, such as his fear of the unknown. Though no formal transition programme currently exists in this case study school, all of the participants were in favour of the post-primary school implementing one in the future.

6.1.3 Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

Post-primary schools are obliged to deliver ‘appropriate guidance’ to all students with a guidance programme that reflects the needs of both Junior and Senior Cycle students. However, evidence suggests that a strong emphasis in guidance counselling provision has been linked to Transition Year, 5th and 6th year students (DES, 2009; McCoy et al., 2014; McCoy et al., 2006).

Role of Guidance Counsellor

The above findings were supported in this research study as Mary acknowledged that “*guidance counselling is more important in 5th and 6th year*” while she regarded the role of a guidance counsellor in “*1st, 2nd year and 3rd year*” is to assist students with their “*choice of subjects*”. For the implementation of a WSA to guidance counselling, it needs to receive strong support, be delivered in a collaborative way and permeate the curriculum (DES, 2012; DES, 2005; IGC, 2008). Findings from this research study identified the need for a guidance class to be established in first year to build a rapport with the guidance counsellor, with one parent stating that “*guidance counselling I think is going to be important in 5th and 6th year*”. More importantly, this research study identifies the need for clarification on the role guidance counsellors can play in supporting first years to settle into post-primary school. As one parent stated: “*what is their role as I’m not always sure myself?*” This clarification needs to occur before a WSA to guidance counselling can be implemented. Many inconsistencies have arisen in the content and provision of guidance programmes due to a lack of clarity on the role of a guidance counsellor (McCoy et al., 2006).

Yearhead

Research has indicated that the yearhead and class tutor system are the most important supports from the perspective of information giving to first year students as they settle into post-primary school (Smyth et al., 2004). All of the participants discussed the role of

yearhead as a positive source of guidance and information. The majority of parents would contact the yearhead for support in relation to their son or daughter.

Teachers

It was indicated by Hearne and Galvin (2014) that the ‘regular teacher’ plays an important role in a WSA to guidance. Although, ‘regular teachers’ indicated that guidance counselling is a territory covered by experts (Finney, 2006). Similarly, Marie acknowledged that not all teachers can be guidance counsellors. She acknowledged that it is “*not just because they are not trained to be guidance counsellors*”. Similar to the role of guidance counsellor, all of the participants acknowledge the supportive role teachers play in their classroom but are unaware of the role they play in a WSA to guidance counselling.

Parental Involvement in the Transition

Research by Smyth (2016a) identified the important role parents play in supporting their children when adjusting to post-primary school and a positive parent-child relationship leads to fewer transitional issues. Interestingly, all of the participants viewed their role differently. The words used by participants to describe their role as parents varied from “*crucial*” to buying the “*right clothes*”. However, no parent identified their role in a WSA to guidance counselling.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A key strength was the fact that this research was a ‘single case study’ which enabled an in-depth exploring of real-life events (Yin, 2009). Another key strength was the researcher’s position within the study as they have worked as a post-primary school teacher for the past eleven years. The researcher had a personal interest in the transition into first year.

This study aimed to address a research gap on transition from an Irish perspective and to explore the individual experiences of first year students. Furthermore, the study aimed to examine the role guidance counsellors, teachers and parents play in assisting students during this time. From an Irish perspective, the findings may provide the guidance counselling profession with insights into the transition from primary to post-primary school.

The researcher conducted their study in the post-primary school where they teach. The research provides reflections and outcomes for this single case study site and therefore, the subjectivity of the researcher can be viewed as a limitation (Cohen et al., 2011; Yin, 2009). To counteract any bias, the researcher applied a reflexive approach throughout the study.

The parents who volunteered to participate in the research study had an interest in the topic of transition from primary to post-primary school as their son or daughter had made this transition in the past few months.

Though purposive sampling was used, six parents volunteered to take part in the semi-structured interviews. This provided a small range to the study (Cohen et al., 2013). A more diverse perspective could have been achieved if a larger number of participants volunteered.

6.3 Recommendations

The following are recommendations for policy, research and best practice:

1. The guidance counsellor role requires some clarification for parents. Parents in this research study were aware of the career and vocational guidance aspects of the role in 5th and 6th year. However, clarification is required to define the role that guidance counsellors can play in supporting the transition to first year.
2. The Department of Education and Skills should establish an integrated transition programme with pre-transition modules implemented in primary schools and post-transition modules delivered in post-primary schools.
3. To implement the transition programme into primary and post-primary schools, continuous professional development (CPD) is a requirement for all teachers. Furthermore, the role teachers can play in supporting students during this transition could be emphasised.
4. A formal transition programme could be adopted in this post-primary school to create supports for incoming first year students in the future. As part of the transition programme, an information booklet could be produced to assist parents in preparing their child for post-primary school.
5. Research could be conducted nationally on the transition from primary to post-primary school. Although, various research studies have been conducted in the last year in relation to a WSA to guidance counselling. An exploration of the impact of Budget 2016 which saw the restoration of 300 guidance hours and Budget 2017 reinstating 100 guidance counselling posts needs to be prioritised.
6. Furthermore, future research could be conducted on the use of guidance counselling hours in relation to the new Junior Cycle Wellbeing Programme.

6.4 Reflexivity in Relation to Personal Learning

In this research study, I applied a reflexive approach to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of transition, while being mindful of my personal, social and cultural context as a researcher (Etherington, 2004). In applying Etherington's (2004) model of 'reflexivity' I used note-taking and a research diary throughout the process of this study.

During the initial stages of this research study I was concerned about the number of participants who would volunteer to take part in the study. Additionally, I was concerned about researcher bias as I am a teacher in the post-primary school. I was fearful of the themes which would emerge which may have impacted on my position in the study. My concerns were reduced significantly once I conducted my pilot interview. I was invigorated by the response rate and their interest in the research topic. I have gained many insights into my own practice as a teacher of first year students. In future, I will spend time at the beginning of the year supporting first year students by helping them to find classrooms and in using their locker more efficiently. I can encourage them to ask questions if they are unsure about something. Finally, I can encourage more communication between the feeder primary schools and my post-primary school. My own personal learning has been positively impacted throughout this research.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter concludes this single case study. It provided a summary of the key findings and outlined the key strengths and limitations of the study. In addition, it has provided numerous recommendations based on the primary research findings and previous literature in relation to future policy and practice in the area of guidance counselling and education. To conclude, this chapter discussed the researcher's positionality and reflexivity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Principal Subject Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Principal Subject Information Sheet

Date: 22nd November 2016

EHS Rec No: 2016_11_10

Research Title: A Case Study Exploring the Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School from the Perspective of Parents and the Implications for the Guidance Counselling Profession

Dear Principal,

I am currently a student on the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the Department of Education and Professional Studies at the University of Limerick under the supervision of James Galvin and Dr Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies it is a requirement to complete a research project on a topic related to guidance counselling.

For my research study, I would like to explore the transition from primary to post-primary school of students from the perspective of parents. The aim of my research is to consider the current supports provided by the school in helping students transition into post-primary school and what could be employed for future first year students.

In order to collect this information I would like to conduct interviews with parents of first year students in your school. Therefore, I would like your permission to access these parents through the Chairperson of the Parent's Council. I hope that twelve parents will volunteer for this research study. Interviews will be audio digital recorded and will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The interviews will be held in a private location in the school building or at a convenient location of choice for the parent and at a time which suits them. All information gathered is strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Afterwards the recorded data will be destroyed.

Participation in the research is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any stage prior to data analysis. All of the recordings will be carried out in conjunction with the University of Limerick guidelines. The results of the research will be circulated through my thesis and may be disseminated through other publications.

The data collected will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. The school's name and the name of individual participants will not be referred to in the research thesis.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me or the Principal Investigator.

Principal Investigator

Dr Lucy Hearne
Course Director
MA In Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development,
School of Education, University of Limerick
Tel: (061) 202931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Other Investigators**Supervisor**

James Galvin, Research Team Supervisor
Email: northcorkcareers@gmail.com

Researcher

Rosemary Ahern
Email: 0402516@studentmail.ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Code number 2016_11_10). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EHS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel No: (061) 234101
Email: ehs@staffmail.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Ahern

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Principal Consent Form

Date: 22nd November 2016

EHS Rec No: 2016_11_10

Research Title: A Case Study Exploring the Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School from the Perspective of Parents and the Implications for the Guidance Counselling Profession

I have read the information sheet and I understand the details of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the school will not be revealed at any stage. The design of this research study protects the privacy of the participants and the school.

- I understand what the research is about and what the data will be used for.
- Participation in this research is voluntary.
- Participants are able to withdraw from this research at any stage, prior to data analysis.
- The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will only be made available to the researcher and the research supervisor. Excerpts from the interview may be used in the research project, but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included.

After considering the above statements, I consent to my school's involvement in this research study.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

Researcher Signature

Printed Name

Date

Rosemary Ahern

Appendix C: Chairperson of the Parents Council Subject Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Sheet (Chairperson of the Parents Council)

Date: 25th November 2016

EHS Rec No: 2016_11_10

Research Title: A Case Study Exploring the Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School from the Perspective of Parents and the Implications for the Guidance Counselling Profession

Dear Chairperson,

I am currently a student on the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the Department of Education and Professional Studies at the University of Limerick under the supervision of James Galvin and Dr Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies it is a requirement to complete a research project on a topic related to guidance counselling.

For my research study, I would like to explore the transition from primary to post-primary school of students from the perspective of parents. The aim of my research is to consider the supports provided by the school in helping students transition in to post-primary school and what could be implemented for future first year students. This research study will be conducted using semi-structured interviews with parents of first year students.

In order to collect this information I would like to conduct interviews with twelve parents of first year students in the school. Interviews will be audio digital recorded and will last approximately between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews will be held in a private location in the school building or at a convenient location of choice for the parent and at a time which suits them. All information gathered will be strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Afterwards the recorded data will be destroyed.

I am seeking permission to attend the next Parent's Council meeting to explain my research study to all present. This should take approximately ten minutes. I would like to explain what my research study is about and to also distribute an information sheet and consent form to parents. I am also asking for your permission after the Parent's Council meeting to send an information sheet and consent form to all parents of first year students who are not in attendance.

Participation in the research is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any stage prior to data analysis. All of the recordings will be carried out in conjunction with the University of Limerick guidelines. The results of the research will be circulated through my thesis and may be disseminated through other publications.

The data collected will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. The school's name and the name of individual participants will not be referred to in the research thesis.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me or the Principal Investigator.

Principal Investigator

Dr. Lucy Hearne
Course Director
MA In Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development,
School of Education, University of Limerick
Tel: (061) 202931
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Other Investigators

Supervisor

James Galvin, Research Team Supervisor
Email: northcorkcareers@gmail.com

Researcher

Rosemary Ahern
Email: 0402516@studentmail.ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Code number 2016_11_10). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EHS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel No: (061) 234101
Email: ehs@staffmail.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Ahern

Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Subject Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Parent/Guardian Subject Information Sheet

Date: 13th December 2016

EHS Rec No: 2016_11_10

Research Title: A Case Study Exploring the Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School from the Perspective of Parents and the Implications for the Guidance Counselling Profession

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am currently a student on the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development with the Department of Education and Professional Studies at the University of Limerick under the supervision of James Galvin and Dr Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies it is a requirement to complete a research project on a topic related to guidance counselling.

For my research study, I would like to explore the transition from primary to post-primary school of students from the perspective of parents. The aim of my research is to consider the current supports provided by the school in helping students transition into post-primary school and what could be employed for future first year students.

For my data collection I would appreciate it if you would volunteer to take part in a face to face interview with me on the topic. The interviews will be audio digital recorded and will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The interviews will be held in a private location in the school building or at a convenient location of your choice and at a time which suits you. All information gathered will be strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Afterwards the recorded data will be destroyed.

Participation in the research is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any stage prior to data analysis. All recordings will be carried out in conjunction with the University of Limerick guidelines. The collected data will be stored on a password protected computer. The transcripts will be stored under password protection for up to seven years after which time they will be deleted. Your name or the identity of the school will not be identifiable. The results from the research will be circulated through my thesis and may be disseminated through other publications.

The data collected and stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. The school's name and the name of individual participants will not be referred to in the research thesis.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me or the Principal Investigator.

Principal Investigator

Dr Lucy Hearne

Course Director

MA In Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development,
School of Education, University of Limerick

Tel: (061) 202931

Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Other Investigators

Supervisor

James Galvin, Research Team Supervisor

Email: northcorkcareers@gmail.com

Researcher

Rosemary Ahern

Email: 0402516@studentmail.ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Code number 2016_11_10). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

EHS Faculty Office

University of Limerick

Tel No: (061) 234101

Email: ehs@staffmail.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Ahern

Appendix E: Parent/Guardian Consent Form



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Date: 13th December 2016

EHS Rec No: 2016_11_10

Research Title: A Case Study Exploring the Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School from the Perspective of Parents and the Implications for the Guidance Counselling Profession

I have read the information sheet and understand the details of the research.

- I understand what the research is about and what the data will be used for.
- I understand that the identity of the participants and school will not be revealed at any stage during the research study.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary.
- I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any stage, prior to data analysis.
- The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will only be made available to the researcher and the research supervisor. Excerpts from the interview may be in the research project, but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included.

I give my consent to take part in an interview with Rosemary Ahern as part of her research project.

Please return in the stamped address envelope.

Parent/Guardian Signature	_____
Parent/Guardian Printed Name	_____
Parent/Guardian Telephone Number	_____
Parent/Guardian Email Address	_____
Date	_____
Researcher Signature	_____
Researcher Printed Name	Rosemary Ahern
Date	_____

Appendix F: Interview Schedule



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Interview Schedule

Length of Interview Approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete

Date: 17th January 2017

EHS Rec No: 2016_11_10

Introduction Questions

- What are the main differences you find between primary and secondary school?
- How did you feel about your child moving from primary school to secondary school?
- What has the experience of sending your eldest child to secondary school been for you?
- Does your son/daughter have older brothers or sisters in secondary school? How did they help your child to settle in to first year?
- Did friends of your son/daughter come to this secondary school? Was this a consideration when deciding on a secondary school?

Before your son/daughter entered post-primary school

- How important is it in your opinion to meet with the secondary school principal prior to your son/daughter moving?
- What is your opinion on this practice being continued in the future?
- What were your concerns about your child starting secondary school?

Settling in to post-primary school

- How has your son/daughter settled in to first year?
- What do they like most about secondary school?
- What do they find challenging about secondary school?
- How has the experience been since the transition for you and your son/daughter?
- Your son/daughter has taken part in a taster session of all the choice subjects on offer in the school. What is your opinion of the taster programme?
- What would you recommend in relation to the taster sessions for next year?
- What is your opinion on the school diary as a means of communication between teachers and parents/guardians?
- What has your son/daughter's experience been in making new friends here?
- What is your opinion on the introduction of the buddy system this year?

Transition

- What is your opinion on the transition from primary to post-primary school?
- From your perspective, what has been challenging during this transition phase?

- What do you think are the greatest challenges for young people in moving from primary to secondary school?
- What do feel this secondary school did well to support first year students to make new friends here?
- Have you any suggestions on how we could improve the transition for students in the future?
- How important is it to address the issue of bullying?
- As a parent, what do you think your role is in preparing your son/daughter for secondary school?

Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

- Whom would you approach if your son/daughter has an issue in this school?
- What is your understanding of the supports available to students in secondary school?
- What is your understanding around the general day-to-day procedures in this school?
- What is your understanding of the guidance service role in post-primary school?
- What role do you see teachers playing in implementing guidance counselling in the school?
- What services would you like to see offered to first year students in this school?
- What is your opinion on first year students having class contact time with the school's guidance counsellor? What areas would you like students in first year to cover?
- What is your opinion on study skill sessions with first year students?

Appendix G: Extracts from Research Diary

Interview 1: Ann

17th January 2017

4:20pm

I had my first interview with a parent today. It was arranged for 4pm but the parent got delayed. I was nervous about the interview and the twenty minutes before she arrived gave me the opportunity to settle myself and read over the questions again.

I spent time contemplating over where I would hold the interview. In my head I had envisaged holding them in my classroom but the desks and benches are stationary. I felt the parent may be distracted from the posters on the wall. I decided to hold the interviews in an office overlooking the main corridor. This is a quiet space and it was ideal for recording the interview. It is a large office with a desk and chairs.

Once I met the parent it eased my nervousness. We chatted while walking to the office. This helped to break the ice and create a rapport with the parent. Before the interview started I stated to the parent that I have my teacher hat off and I am now researching for my college work. I made it clear that the information or answers she gave were confidential.

The parent came across very relaxed. She was very enthusiastic about taking part in the interview. Once the interview started, the parent stopped at different occasions and reflected on what they were about to say before proceeding to answer the question. I felt I was agreeing with the parent throughout the interview. In listening back to the interview, I felt I was leading the parent in answering two different questions and I was putting words in their mouth. This is something I need to be aware of before the next interview. I was aware of my position as a practitioner researcher and how the parent would respond to my questions.

Interview 2: Maeve

18th January 2017

4:10pm

Today I felt a lot more confident in interviewing Maeve. It had been a hectic day in school. Before we went to the office, Maeve asked if I needed a minute. I was running after myself all day. I took two minutes in the staffroom which was great to compose myself.

The parent was very knowledgeable in her answers and I was really interested in what she had to say. It was a very positive account of her experience as a mother of three children and an open account of how she supports her son who has a learning difficulty.

In reflecting back on the interview, it made me think about my own experience in teaching students and my approach to students with learning needs. It has raised my awareness in relation to the needs and expectation of some students in the school who are genuinely trying their best.

I felt confident in asking the questions and the interview flowed very well. The parent seemed comfortable and her answers were very articulate. She took the time to answer the question asked. I learned a lot from conducting this interview.

Interview 3: Rena

24th January 2017

5:20pm

From the minute I met June it was a rush. The school building closes at 6pm so I was conscious of starting straight away to get the maximum time out of the interview. It was a rush to get the consent form signed and the interview set-up as quickly as possible.

During the interview I was thinking how a video recording would have been interesting. At different stages during the interview I felt what the parent was saying and their body language did not match up. It would have been interesting to watch it back.

I felt the parent was open and honest in their account. Rena made a few comparisons between her two children which was interesting. I think Rena wanted to give me an insight in to how her son protects himself in school and to acknowledge that he is slow to disclose when something is troubling him.

I felt a lot more comfortable and relaxed with this parent even though I had never met her before. It was reassuring to hear that her son was aware of the role of the guidance counsellor and that he felt comfortable in asking the principal for support if he needed it. Rena described the caring environment which is in place in this post-primary school.

I felt Rena hesitated at times and may have went with the positive stance in her answers as opposed to going deep in to areas which could be improved. The interview lasted about 25 minutes.

Interview 4: Marie **25th January 2017** **5:00pm**

I felt the parent was too positive in her approach to the interview. Everything about the post-primary school was great. I felt she did not want to give areas of improvement as she did not want to seem critical of the school.

I was very aware of my position as a researcher but also as a teacher of Business Studies in the school. The parent mentioned out of all the choice subjects that she wanted her daughter to study Business Studies. I felt she was showing me that she regarded my subject and thought very highly of it. The parent was happy to acknowledge how her daughter and she have very similar likes.

Her opinion of the guidance counsellor being used more in 5th and 6th year was interesting and the relationship that the student has with her yearhead. It was interesting to hear how close the student is with her older cousins in the school and that she has a strong support group that she can lean on.

Interview 5: Karen **30th January 2017** **4:10pm**

Today I began by clarifying to the interviewee that the interview would be audio recorded and that I was removing my teacher hat. I wanted to ensure that the interviewee was aware that a report or information from her interview was not being sent back to the principal on an individual account. She was very open to this.

The interviewee closed up in the beginning and moved to face the window. I felt she was uncomfortable talking about friends and bullying on different occasions throughout the interview. She looked for approval from me on two different instances. She was open in letting her son pick his taster subjects.

I felt comfortable in letting her pause to gather her thoughts at different stages which is an improvement for me. I would have always tried to fill the silence.

She did say that she would like correction on information which she may have picked up wrong.

I felt the interview went extremely quick. Karen was very positive in what the school is doing to provide support to first year students.

Interview 6: Mary **1st February 2017** **5:00pm**

Mary is a parent in the school whom I have met over the years at Parent Teacher Meetings. I was looking forward to this interview as Mary is easy going and we have built up a lovely rapport over the years. I was conscious of taking time before the interview to get myself in to the head space as a researcher. I did not want Mary to think that this was another Parent Teacher Meeting. I was aware of my enthusiasm in interviewing Mary.

Mary is a positive parent and this came across in her interview. Everything was great about her daughter moving in to first year. I used paraphrasing and I had to listen carefully to identify areas that I needed more depth to fully hear what was going on for Mary and her daughter in first year.

Mary talked a lot about her eldest son during the interview. I felt some of the questions touched Mary and made her nostalgic. I can remember teaching her eldest son and how he

progressed to college. Mary and I have a lot in common. She has six children and I am from a family of six. A lot of what Mary spoke about resonated with me. I was able to identify this and I parked my feelings so that I could focus on what Mary wanted to say. I feel that this interview has not changed our relationship.

Appendix H: Extract from Analysed Interview

R: Researcher

I: Interviewee

Interview with Mary

Date: 1st February 2017

R: Very good. Am....so I suppose guidance counselling section is the next area. And I suppose we are adopting a whole school approach to guidance counselling with the cut backs in hours and everything like that. How do you see teachers as a support to students in first year? or how do they support them in first year?

I: Ah....I suppose the guidance counselling is more important in 5th and 6th year if, from my point of view in guiding them in the right road to take for themselves but (sighs) for 1st, 2nd year and 3rd year, I suppose choice of subjects has a lot to do with that then as well. And guiding (sighs)

GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

R: Would you see the, the role like, should they have a class in first year XXXX or? If they did have a class in first year, what would you see being done with them in that area?

I: Am.....(sighs) I suppose 2nd and 3rd year maybe because your choices of subjects are a big thing at that stage. And....going into 5th and 6th year then if you have the basics, the groundwork done in 2nd year and 3rd year it's much easier then to move on.

VIEW OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN 5TH & 6TH YEAR

R: Ok, so maybe subject choices for 2nd and 3rd year and then focusing on career choices then in 5th and 6th

I: Ya, ya that way but then, but then you have students, XXXX (my other son) did it, he didn't have Engineering in 1st, 2nd year or 3rd year but did it in 5th and 6th year but I always felt it was wrong for him.

VIEW OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING WITH JUNIOR CYCLE STUDENTS

R: Ok, how did he find it, did he find it hard to pick it up or.....

I: Am....he wouldn't have been the best at it ok, am.....

R: And was it due to a course, like he had to have Engineering for a course?

I: No

R: No, ok

I: No, no, no, he went the business line, it was a choice of subjects back in his time, ok, the choice of subjects didn't fall into place for him. He wanted Accounting, there was only 4 students....

ELDEST SONS EXPERIENCE

R: And it wasn't put on

I: It wasn't put on, ok.... That would be an issue alright but you can't, we can't control that as parents, you know.... I think it would be important for students in 5th and 6th year if they could get 3 of their 4 choices. Now he didn't....

R: He got 2?

I: He got 2, you know, so that was.....

R: A bit of a blow to him so.....

I: A bit of a bummer, ya, you know...ah..... then he came back and repeated, as you know and he got on fine

R: He got on fine

I: But he got the choice subject he wanted the second time round but he had to do 2 years in 1 year

R: To catch up on it.

I: To catch up on it, you know so.....that is, that is huge.

R: Ok, so would you see the guidance counsellor role in that in meeting them?

I: Yes, ya, in meeting them, but you put down your 4 choices, 1, 2, 3, 4, ok, but you're not guaranteed them, you know.

ROLE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

R: Depending on demand

I: Depending on demand, supply and demand with teacher ratio and all that sort of business so.... You can have all the guidance counsellors going and I mean that's what he wanted and he still ended up doing what he wanted but he had to come back

R: And do a year

I: To repeat the year but that's probably his own fault too he didn't work the first year of it. It worked out fine, he got it the second year.

R: Do you reckon that the year stood to him XXXX?

I: Oh absolutely, oh ya, no doubt whatsoever. He matured, you know it was no harm, it was the best thing he ever did. Absolutely. I would prefer to see them coming back to repeat rather than doing Transition Year.

R: Ok, ok...

I: Right, that's me but.....

R: And XXXX say so back I suppose to staff members, how do you see their role in, in supporting 1st year students?

I: I've no problems with them. They're great.... Am..... I had the 1st year parent teacher meeting a couple of weeks ago and they are getting on great and the teachers are very good with them and no, no they're all fine.

ROLE OF TEACHERS